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BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK;

OR,

A COUNTY FAMILY.



BY THE AUTHOR OF

"FOUND DEAD," "LOST SIR MASSINGBERD," "CARLYON'S
YEAR," "ONE OF THE FAMILY," &c.

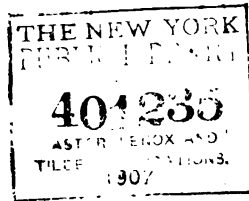
James Payn

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A BEGGAR ON HORSEBACK;

OR,

A COUNTY FAMILY.

CHAPTER I.

SLOGAN.

ON the northern coast of North Wales stands Slogan, with its foot in the sea. It is a great mountain; great in size, though that is its least remarkable attribute; great in wealth, for it is a treasure-house of useful stone; and great in dim historic memories. On its summit was once the camp of a British host, year after year; but the Roman eagles never flew so high. Around it still survive, like circlets about a monarch's crown, three mighty rings of *débris*, that were, a thousand years ago, three ramparts of stone. Within them are still visible the casemates in which the defenders lived, and watched, as from an eyrie, land and sea. Many a vale, now fertile, can be seen from it, stretched out like an open map, and the rugged outlines of a hundred hills. On the calmest day in June, there is wind enough on Slogan's top to belly out the folds of a royal standard, which mayhap (in some shape or another) in days of old it did.

But few folks care to climb to the summit now, or to concern themselves therewith. As with the maiden in the ballad, it is the face of Slogan which is his fortune. Not, however, as in her case, by reason of its beauty. It is scarred and seamed, as surely no other mountain ever was, by the hand of man. Not Xerxes, with all his power, could, in his insolent domination over nature, have so transformed a hill, as the patient hewers of stone have altered Slogan.

Naturally grim and stern enough, he has now, thanks to pick and gunpowder, become one scar. Like an ancient warrior, whose ferocity has been enhanced by the small-pox, he scowls upon the smiling summer sea. Fifty times a day he emits, volcano-wise, a little puff of smoke, and then the stones come rattling down, and there is yet another blemish in his majestic features. Some of him, in point of fact, is *gone*. A day will come (forty generations hence, however) when Slogan will indeed be literally, as well as metaphorically, a thing of the past. The last wagon-load of him will then have gone to pave the streets of what may be Liverpool and Manchester in one.

But at present he is high and huge enough, and though girdled about by tram-ways, and divided into stages by inclines (which should be rather called "perpendiculars"), these are scarcely to be seen from the foot of him at all. You must toil up some winding path, worn in the slag and refuse, to discover them. Then you will also find that Slogan is a very ant-hill of human beings. About his forehead men are clustering like ants indeed; appearing and disappearing, some with burdens, and some without, but all in motion. The mountain resounds with the stroke of their picks; with the echoes of the bugles, which give warning that a blast is about to take place; and with the roar of the blasts themselves. From terrace to terrace the stone is carried in huge trucks, that descend with immense velocity, and are connected by an endless chain, which by their weight at the same time hauls up "the empties." By the side of these inclines are ladders of stone, by which the quarrymen go up and down. These workers, whose calling lies in so weird a spot, two thousand feet and more above the fields in which their forefathers labored (for this trade is comparatively new), are, in their appearance, different from other men. They are giants—often in height, but always in thews and sinews. The breeze of the mountain or of the sea blows perpetually upon them, and they thrive in it amazingly. The hammers which they use with ease, a field laborer could scarcely lift. They are as good-natured as were the Goths, but, like them, are subject to fits of passion, and then—

They are affable, but it is no use addressing them in the English tongue, because they do not speak it. They understand, however, the one word "beer," especially when accompanied by the exhibition of a silver coin. For the rest, the magistrates assure you that they are an extremely well-conducted race of people, and the Established clergy have nothing to say against them, nor do with them at all.

August morning there are six hundred Titans upon Slogan, armed with spears and axes; but it is now noon—the truce-time—between them and Nature, when they lay aside their weapons, to dine. Upon the most elevated terrace, and approached from the rest

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only by these steep inclines, there are a hundred men or so, consuming their midday meal—generally a hunch of bread and meat that would last you and me for a week. Some of them sitting in the open, under the shadow of the cliff; some in the little bombproof huts, which are built very literally as “shelters from the blast;” and a few even swinging against the face of the rock from the ropes that support them there during their labors. Dangling between sea and sky, in a manner that makes one dizzy to behold, they lazily cut and munch, and watch the white-sailed ships come out and in, that carry away the result of their labors from the little jetty; but otherwise they are not greatly interested in the spectacle that nature spreads before them, and which causes such exhibitions of enthusiasm in those summer visitors from the neighboring village who have the hardihood to reach the spot. There is one such visitor even now; a tall young fellow of what is called “distinguished” appearance, and certainly of an appearance very distinguished from the rest of the occupants of the plateau. His face is pale, and rendered still more so by the black mustache he wears, curved like a bow, and twisted at the ends; his small hands are as white as a woman’s; and though his limbs are well and strongly shaped enough, he seems, by comparison with those sons of Anak about him, almost like a woman in man’s clothes; he appears effeminate even by contrast with the young over-looker by whose side he stands, and who is explaining to him the details of the scene before him. And yet John Denton is no Hercules. He is only a fine strong-built young fellow, with an eye like a hawk, and a broad brow, over which the short brown curls cluster so thickly that it seems low; his fingers, it is true, are long enough to have pertained to one of much greater height, and are extraordinary supple; his speech is precise and distinct, whether he gives directions to the quarrymen in their own tongue, or addresses his companion in English. It was in this, rather than in build, that the most marked difference between himself and Herbert Stanhope lay. The latter spoke with effort—used that languid mode affected more or less by all young men of his class, and which, to some ears (notwithstanding that the speaker may mean to be civil and well-behaved enough), sounds always galling and contemptuous. And thus it was in the present case, where certainly no assumption of superiority was intended.

Herbert Stanhope was no drowsing swell from the Row or St. James’s Street, but he had passed much of his life among those silly fops, and had contracted their manner. If he had been born a poor man, and Denton a rich one, their present positions might quite possibly have been reversed: as it was, the former was rising through his fortune as quickly as the latter (and other luxuries pertaining to his life) could help him to do it; while John Denton was making his way up the social ladder with as sure a foot as he scaled the inclines of Slo-

gan. A parish orphan, he had risen at the National School to be pupil-teacher; then exhibiting considerable talent for figures, he had been employed by the agent for the quarries, first at his office, and subsequently on the mountain, and was now biding his time—preparing himself, meanwhile, by incessant study in leisure hours—for quite another line in life, that of civil engineer, an appointment connected with which profession had been promised to him by his present employer. It was the old story of a self-made and self-making man, but with a difference. John Denton’s nature was not of that grasping sort which uses all things only to one end. He was ambitious, but not so greedy of success as to deny himself all refreshments upon the road to it, so that, when it is reached at last, the appetite for them, so unnaturally thwarted, has fled forever. One may wait for the enjoyments of life as one may wait for one’s dinner—too long; and perhaps John Denton might have done so, his mind being deeply set upon getting on in the world, had it not been for one circumstance: he was not working for himself alone. His eyes were so bright, and his face so smiling—although, as we have hinted, it would now and again flush angrily at his companion’s tone—because there was a certain modest damsel, on the other side of Slogan, who had promised to be his bride, in good time; by which we mean early; for he was still in that station of life in which it is found possible to marry on even less than three hundred pounds a year.

“Who is yonder old man with the big white head, Mr. Overlooker? He seems too ancient for this sort of hammer-work, although I noticed that you (very properly) were not disposed to be hard upon him—”

“I do not understand you, sir,” interrupted Denton, with irritation. “Mr. Blackburn is no idler, I can tell you; although his arms may not move so fast as a younger man’s.”

“Mr. Blackburn, eh? What! have we gentlemen quarrymen here, then? Well, upon my life, now you mention it, there is an air of past grandeur about that old fellow, as though he had seen better days.”

These remarks referred to one who, while certainly by far the senior of those present, wore also a look of superiority almost as great as that of Mr. Stanhope himself, although it owed nothing (as in his case) to attire, which was that of a common laborer. This personage was sitting with his back to the rock, his arms folded, his lips compressed, and his eyes darting from underneath their shaggy brows no very agreeable glances upon Stanhope himself.

“Hush, sir!” muttered the overlooker sternly; “do you not see that he observes you are speaking of him with pity; and that he does not wish to be pitied?”

“I will give him half a crown, and a better cigar than he ever smoked in dreams, to make my peace with him,” returned the young gentleman with a sort of good-natured

scorn, as he drew from his pocket a seal-skin case.

"If you offer him money," interposed Denton hastily, "he will break your head in with his pick, sir. Anthony Blackburn is as much a gentleman as you are, every whit, although he is a poorer man than even I."

"What!" ejaculated the other, in a voice that, in his great surprise, had lost every trace of languor, "do you mean to tell me that that is Anthony Blackburn of Derbyshire—the man who was disinherited fifty years ago for marrying his mother's waiting-maid? Why I've heard my grandfather tell that story a dozen times. My own house is within half a dozen miles of Redcombe Manor: I know the place as well as you know this quarry."

"If you know any thing about such matters, sir, for Heaven's sake, do not speak of them so loud. The remembrance of all that has passed and gone is bitter to him as gall, and needs no revival. He was shamefully used by his own flesh and blood, as I have heard—parents, and brothers, and all."

"Yes, it was hard lines. His father, Russell Blackburn (who was as proud as Lucifer, and as cruel), turned him out—eldest born though he was—in the cold, for marrying the girl for whom they do say the old satyr had a penchant himself; then, when he died, the three brothers followed suit. I don't suppose any one of them ever gave our friend there a farthing."

"Ay, but they were punished for it," answered Denton gravely. "They were cursed in root and branch."

"What! by the old gentleman yonder?" returned Stanhope with a cynical smile. "Well, I dare say they were. But hard words did not break their bones, my good friend—it was hard riding that did that; at least, the second brother, Ferdinand, broke his neck in a steeple-chase; and something of the same sort happened to his son. Then hard living killed the third brother, Charles—he drank like a fish, and would not permit a woman to come within the Manor gates; but he had his good points, people said. Then Richard was drowned in the Dove. In fact, if it was not for young Dick, this old gentleman stonebreaker might yet enjoy his own again, for, as I have heard, his name was put in the entail by his father last of all, by way of mockery, since it seemed out of the question that he should survive three younger brothers and their children. However, against nineteen (for Dick is scarcely of age), sixty-eight (and old Anthony must be that at least) has not much chance; and, moreover, Dick's going to be married."

"For Heaven's sake, don't tell him *that*, sir!" exclaimed Denton earnestly. "It is a hopeless fancy, as you say; but, nevertheless, he clings to the idea that he shall still one day be master of Redcombe Manor. It is his dream by night, his castle in the air by day. He is always saying how that young Squire Richard has a short throat, and will die of a fit, notwithstand-

ing Miss Ellen tells him how wicked it is thus to—"

"And who is Miss Ellen?" As though to recompense himself for the unwonted interest he had evinced in his recent talk, Mr. Herbert Stanhope put this question with raised eyeglass and an elaborate indifference.

"She is Anthony Blackburn's orphan grandchild," said John Denton quietly, after a little pause.

"And the only one?" inquired the other lazily. "Gad, I'd take fifty to one, in ponies, about her coming into the property after all."

"Ellen is only the granddaughter," observed Denton coldly. "Anthony had another son besides her father."

"Had! Is he dead, then?"

But before this question could be answered, a young girl came swiftly round the more distant corner of the crag with a covered basket in her hand, and on towards the spot where the old man was still sitting, with his eyes moodily fixed upon the ground.

"What a charming little fairy!" observed Mr. Stanhope critically; "with what a grace she carries herself as well as her basket! But it must be hard work for her coming up these steep inclines of yours, Mr. Overlooker, eh?"

"She does not come up that way," answered Denton curtly; "there is a path over the mountain down to this top level."

"How queer it seems to see a petticoat among all these rough fellows," continued the other musing. "It must be rather a dangerous experiment for her, surely?"

"What! for a modest young girl to bring her grandfather his dinner?" returned John Denton bitterly. "It may be different—I have heard it is—among gentlemen such as you; but if any man here were to offer her an insult, the rest of them would pitch him down the mountain, as though he were a barrow of rubbish; and serve him right, too!" added the speaker with vehemence.

"To be thrown from the Tarpeian Rock for snatching a kiss from yonder pretty damsel? Well, that seems a severe punishment, considering the great temptation," answered the other coolly. "I had no idea the Welsh code of morals was such a strict one. The Registrar-general's Report upon the subject—Ah!" cried the speaker, perceiving the young girl had seated herself by the old man's side, "that is Anthony Blackburn's granddaughter, is it? Then, now I see what you mean. There is something in good blood, after all the Radicals have said, which carries weight with it even here, it seems. You look upon this young girl as a sort of monster, although she has been disposed of as property: well, it's very creditable to you, Overlooker, and shows how the feudal system still survives in these outlandish latitudes."

"You mistake, sir, altogether," answered Denton in a voice that shook with passion. "All blood is alike in my eyes, and all women

have an equal claim to my protection, but Ellen Blackburn is my promised wife, and demands a respect from every body which I shall take care is paid."

"My good sir," said Stanhope quietly, as he scanned the young girl with undisguised but not impertinent admiration, "I do assure you I respect Miss Blackburn amazingly, and I congratulate you with all my heart."

CHAPTER II.

OVER THE HILLS TOGETHER.

WHEN Denton said that the quarrymen all treated Ellen Blackburn with consideration, he did not exaggerate the fact; and Stanhope also was right in concluding that the position her grandfather had once held in the world had something to do with it. They pitied the misfortunes of this old man, who had worked among them with such seeming patience for many years, and had done nothing to offend them; while the tender grace of the young girl herself—so different from the robust attractions of their own charmers—won from them a certain courtesy, which showed itself in their abstinence from remark upon her actions. If other young women had brought dinner to their relatives to the "top level," they would, doubtless, have hardly escaped comment and rough compliment; but of this sprite-like messenger no notice was taken. She had tripped along past group after group, and save from a kindly nod from a giant head or two, which she had acknowledged by a grateful smile, had excited no stir. It was a sight they saw every day—this pretty but pale-faced girl, with her covered basket, which contained bread and meat for her grandfather; and they looked upon it, through their tobacco-smoke, approvingly.

"You are late, my dear," said the old man, lifting up his gray head as she drew near, and regarding her with eager eyes. "Was there any reason for it—any particular reason?"

"There was the reason of the wind upon the hill, grandfather, which was dead against me," answered the girl, smiling. "See, I brought you your favorite dinner—beef and mustard, and a nice fresh lettuce."

"There was nothing for me by the post, was there?" inquired the old man, without taking the least notice of these dainties.

"No, grandfather."

This reply was given with a dejected air, quite different from that with which she had hitherto spoken. The fact was the post had not yet come in to their out-of-the-way cottage, but she had answered that same question a hundred times, and always in the same manner. Anthony Blackburn was forever endeavoring to tell her that was to tell him that the last barrier between him and his rights was removed—he cared not how, but surely, if there was justice in heaven, the thing, however long delayed, must so hap-

pen at last. Was it not clear that a judgment had gone forth against his usurping kindred? First, Ferdinand and his son; then Charles; then Richard swept away; and now there was only Richard's brat between him and his long-lost wealth. Would not death take this one, like the rest? After fifty years of waiting—years of toil and gloom indeed, but which had been illumined occasionally by these family casualties, these spectral fires, in quite a brilliant manner—the goal would be surely reached at last! True, it was a boy's life against his own; but had not Ferdinand's boy died before he had reached this lad's age; and were not his father, and Charles, and Richard, all junior to him (Anthony)? and yet all were dead! However, the news was not to come to-day, it seemed; and the old man, after one weary sigh, began to eat his meal.

Anthony Blackburn was, independently of his white beard and shaggy eyebrows, of a striking appearance; straight as a poplar, notwithstanding his weight of years, and the long use of the huge hammer which lay near him; his eyes had lost none of their fire; and his large limbs were still very powerful, although their elasticity had departed. Perhaps, if he had not been so strong, his fellow-workmen would not have paid him such respect; at all events, it pleased them to see in this old fellow who had been brought up to no such trade, a skillful quarryman, who used the heaviest tools by choice.

In Ellen's basket there was neither beer nor spirits, but she took from it a glass tumbler—a vessel unknown among the other tenants of the top level, who used horn and tin—and having filled it with water from a spring that trickled over the rock, placed it by her grandfather's side. Scarcely had she done so, when a splinter flying from some rock where the men were resuming work, fell upon it and shattered it to atoms.

"My only glass," was the old man's bitter comment. "Misfortune never forgets me in small things as well as—"

"Sir, I thank you."

Stanhope had marked the catastrophe, and stepping hastily forward, offered the silver bottle of his pocket-flask in place of the broken one.

"You will permit me to fill it with sherry instead of water," said he politely—"I have been here than I require."

"Nay, sir; I do not drink wine—at present," responded the old man stiffly; "and yet, since you are so courteous—yes, I will just taste it." It was curious to see his look at the costly cup as he put his lips to its contents. They had not touched silver (he was thinking) for half a century. How excellent was this liquor, the like of which (though it was but hotel sherry) had been so long a stranger to his palate. He had intended just to sip a little, but now he slowly drained the delicious draught to the lees. As he gave back the empty cup to Stanhope, his eye caught sight of something engraved

upon it. "Is that your name, sir?" inquired he with sudden interest.

"Yes; and my address—Herbert Stanhope, Curlew Hall, at your service."

"Oh, indeed," returned the old man with an affectation of unconcern, while his face, bronzed with sun and wind, turned suddenly quite pale.—"Good-morning, sir, and thank you: it's time for me to begin work again."

With that he took up his accustomed weapon; but the visitor, who at this hint had retired to some distance, noticed that he did not make a stroke with it for several minutes, but stood leaning on the long handle, as if in thought. Stanhope looked round for the girl, but she had disappeared; and then for the overlooker, but he had also slipped away; so, shrugging his shoulders, he lighted a cigar, and betook himself down the unprotected incline, notwithstanding that a bugle had just blown to give warning to all to seek shelter.

A general opinion was thereupon expressed in the Welsh dialect among the occupants of the top level that their recent visitor was a cool hand, and it was not the first time that that observation had in other high circles been made with reason upon Mr. Herbert Stanhope.

Not a quarter of a mile from this same populous spot, Slogan was as solitary as Sahara. You had only to turn the northern corner of the crag, and take the steep but winding footpath that led upward, to find yourself out of all human sight and hearing. This would have been the case with Ellen Blackburn, already started on her homeward journey, but for the presence of John Denton, who had accompanied her so far, in order to carry her basket for her, and assist her up the cliff; a work which, considering that the basket was empty, and the young girl, although so delicate-looking, as agile as a chamois, may be set down as one of supererogation.

"There, John, that will do," said she; "I will not have you come any farther. As it is, you have wasted half your dinner-hour."

"I need no dinner," said John quietly. "The sight of you is meat and drink to me."

"But you are also neglecting your duty, Mr. Overlooker," urged she with a charming pretense of rigor.

"No, I'm not; I'm *overlooking* them all now," said John with twinkling eyes; for a little joke went a great way with this excellent young fellow. "I don't intend to let you cross the mountain alone to-day, Ellen. There are hawks abroad, and I mean to see my pretty one safe to her dovecot. You need not look up at the sky for a buzzard. You know as well as I do what I mean; the bud upon your cheek is blowing, blowing into a bonny, bonny rose-blush. There! Yes, Ellen, I saw him stare at you, the insolent hound. We want no scented gentlemen of that sort on honest Slogan. I wish the big hotel yonder had never been built to harbor such folks, though its stones did come out of our quarry."

"It appears to me," said the young girl gravely, "that Mr. John Denton is jealous."

"No, darling; it is not that. Only it makes me sick to see these idle supercilious scoundrels wasting their own time, as well as that of every body they come across, simply because they have nothing to do but mischief. It angers me to have to listen to their long-drawn stupid drawl, not to mention the opinions (if they can be called such) with which they are sure to favor one, and which are simply infamous. If I had my will, there should be no such drones among us at all."

"What! you would blow the whole hive to pieces with your favorite gunpowder, eh, John, sooner than not destroy them? Poor drones! and would you sweep away all the butterflies also?" and she pointed laughingly to an exquisite creature of that species, a very embodiment of light, and joy, and color, flitting from sunlit stone to stone across their path.

"No, dear, I would not," responded the young man; "because, although I am not aware that butterflies are useful, in their beauty and in their grace they remind me of you. I said I was not jealous, nor am I, because I think you just the truest-hearted girl that ever breathed mountain air. Else, where rank is concerned, or even a little social superiority in the way of money, you women are as weak as water: of course, you would never disgrace yourself like Phoebe Morgan or Alice Jones—but I sometimes think that even in your case, if you were suddenly to become rich, Ellen, and I was just as I am now, or, perhaps, a trifle more prosperous" (this was added with a certain pride), "you might ask yourself whether you might not have looked a little higher—on such a young fellow, for instance, as we have just left down yonder, with a grand air, and well-fitting clothes, and pretty boots, and a sort of—"

She stopped him short with a grave face, and her slim fingers upon his wrist: "And do you really think such things as that of me, John Denton?"

"I can't help *thinking*, Nelly. Don't be angry with me. I tease myself, as lovers do, with foolish thoughts of losing you—that's all."

The firm strong voice of the overlooker had softened into speech as gentle as her own; his eyes were full of tenderness; and his hand trembled in her grasp.

"I think that must be all, indeed," said she; "but I am sorry even for that much. I do not tease myself with such thoughts of you, John. I feel quite sure, that though you should get to be as wealthy as Mr. Rhys, who is king of Slogan, or were made the engineer to the great railway that is coming, at thousands a year, you would still take Ellen Blackburn for your wife, penniless as she is, and notwithstanding the shame that clings—"

He placed his finger gently on her lips, and kissed her forehead. "Hush, darling, hush! no word of that. You are quite right. I have no other aim in life but to make you mine; and yet—although Heaven knows I have yearned for you—I have preferred to wait until I had

earned something: until I had built a wall to shield you from the bitter wind of want, so solid that it should keep my darling safe forever."

"Do not set your mind so much on wealth, John," returned the young girl seriously. "I have every day the evil of that before my eyes."

"Yes, Ellen; but what your poor grandfather longs for is a will-o'-the-wisp. I heard even to-day that this young Richard Blackburn, into whose shoes he looks to step, is engaged to be married. Whereas, what I have fixed my eyes on is a reality; the dream of *my life* has already come true, thank God! I have been promised an appointment upon this very railway of which you spoke. Mr. Rhys put the letter in my hands only last night; and when I have got it, Ellen, and I am sure to get it—look at me face to face—put your hands in mine—now answer me: will you be John Denton's wife in three months hence?"

"You know I will," said she with a bright blush as he folded her in his arms; "that is, if you can get my grandfather's consent. To him I owe every thing in life, John, and I am sure you would not wish me to forget it."

"There is no fear of your grandfather, Ellen, since I shall have your grandmother on my side," said the young man confidently. "It is to tell her this news that I am crossing Slogan with you to-day, and have left my men to take care of themselves. I think that two hundred a year and a house with eight rooms will recommend me to her good graces, eh? To think that five years ago I was but a pupil-teacher—though at the same school with you, darling, and therefore well placed enough—without a penny in the world!" and Denton's face glowed with conscious triumph.

"And I have not a penny still," said the young girl sadly.

"Nay, you have what I have, my darling; 'with all my worldly goods I thee endow'; that's in the marriage-service, you know.—Oh, tell me," continued he with unwonted fervor, "are you as happy as I? Did the heather ever seem so springy beneath your feet, or the sky so bright above your head? And does not our sky, too, appear without a cloud, my darling?"

"It is very bright, dear John," answered she with a grave smile, "and I am very happy; but it is not without a cloud."

"I guess what you mean," said he; "but I do not see why the fact of your uncle being an unsatisfactory sort of person—well, a scoundrel, if one must call things by their right names—should interpose between us and the sunshine. Why, the greatest people of this country, my dear, are mostly sprung from scoundrels—Norman robbers, courtly jobbers, and state-strivers of all sorts—and are certainly not thought the less of upon that account. Then, why should you and I distress ourselves about Uncle Will? Let us think of nothing but what is pleasant. See, upon your cottage window yonder, how the sun is glinting—the brightest welcome, notwith-

standing that you are not within it, that it ever beamed on me. It is surely an omen for good."

CHAPTER III.

MOOR COTTAGE.

THE cottage to which John Denton had ascribed the gift of augury was a homely one enough, but still superior to those inhabited by quarrymen generally. It had been once the residence of the bailiff of a great sheep-farmer; but since Slogan had borne a more profitable crop than scanty fleeces, the house had been unoccupied, and was rented very cheaply, by reason of its desolate and out-of-the-way position. It was fully three miles from any other residence, and set in the very heart of the hills. Not a tree, not a shrub grew near it, although in a deep gully close beside it were hid a few mountain-ashes; but yet in summer-time, as now, eye could scarcely light on a more charming spot. Rich people in town would have given much to be transported thither for a single August day. If the air could only have been bottled—as perhaps may happen some day—and the sunshine hermetically preserved within, it would have fetched guineas a dozen; and as it was, the view from the cottage door had been photographed, and delighted many a beholder who had never stood there in the flesh. A waste of purple moorland stretched before it, fringed to westward by a long jagged line of hills, beyond which rose still higher ranges, that in most days were lost in cloud-land, but now stood out with the utmost clearness, each slab of stone distinct in its mountain wall. To the north, rose Slogan, immense, imperial; a giant cone unscathed on this side by man's ravages; to the east, lay the glittering ocean; and on the south, a promontory stretched far seaward, in the hollow of whose sandy bay a little town sparkled like a jewel.

Nature, however, which had thus put forth her best efforts to enhance this mountain dwelling, was but ill assisted by Art. The house—a one-storied building, with a roof of thatch, on which great stones were placed (as though it had been a mark for aërolites), to secure it against the violent winds—boasted but six small and scantily furnished rooms. Even in summer, the rough wind forced its way through the ill-fitting door and crazy windows, while in winter matters were wretched indeed; and it was to the inclemency of Moor Cottage that Ellen Blackburn chiefly owed her pale features and delicate frame. The fireplaces were not built upon scientific principles, and the peat-smoke, instead of taking the road provided for it to the upper air, wandered through the house, filling it with a cough-provoking haze, and blackening the low ceilings. The picturesqueness of the family poverty, in short (as usual), ceased with the external surroundings. Nor was the meanness or discomfort of the interior of the cottage redeemed by its solitary female inmate, who could now be discerned by the young couple, as they drew

near, standing in the doorway, and screening her eyes with her hand from the glare of the sun. She was watching them intently, and a gleam of satisfaction sat on her large and somewhat coarse features as she did so. Age and poor living do not improve folk's looks, and it was difficult to detect in that bony frame, and that ruddy but haggard face, even the faintest traces of the beauty for which Anthony Blackburn, in the heyday of his early manhood, had lost caste and fortune. Yet, fifty years ago, Mary Gryll had been the village beauty of the place where Anthony was the young squire: tall and finely proportioned; dark as a gipsy, but with a tenderness of expression in her splendid eyes that never gipsy wore. Even now her eyes were brilliant, and perhaps looked the more so by contrast with the loose and shrivelled skin in which they were set. Her teeth, too, were very regular and perfect, for one who had lived so long on such hard fare. Otherwise, there was nothing to distinguish her from any of her age and class, upon whom the primal curse of a too toilsome life seems to have fallen more heavily than on the sex against which it was pronounced. Her dress was sordid and ragged, and as she stood with her sleeves rolled half-way up her arms, it was only too manifest that personal cleanliness was no longer one of Mrs. Blackburn's virtues.

She welcomed John Denton very heartily, and dusted a chair for his reception in spite of his efforts to prevent her. It did her good, she said, to see him, almost as much (she added with a sly look) as it did her granddaughter. How kind it was of him to leave the works where he was always so busy, to accompany Ellen across the moor. It was evident, in short, that Mrs. Blackburn was anxious as ever was Belgravian mother in the case of an eligible *parti*, to encourage the young overlooker in the prosecution of his addresses, and that she did not even need to hear the good news he brought with him to favor his suit.

That two hundred a year, indeed, with the house with eight rooms, seemed to sound in her ears as almost too great a stroke of fortune, for after one involuntary lifting up of her hands, she began sighing and shaking her head.

"Ah, well," said she, "then, I suppose, this is the last visit as you will pay us poor folks, Mr. Denton? You will be too proud and too great a man to come to Moor Cottage, I warrant; for that's only the way of the world."

"I don't know as to that, Mrs. Blackburn," returned the overlooker with some indignation, for he did not understand the feminine craft of his hostess; "but it is not *my* way, I do assure you: if I was ever so rich, I should be only proud because I had the wealth to offer Ellen. I value her far above house and income, and it was only for her sake that I have waited until I had won them, to ask your consent to our marriage."

"And that you shall have, John Denton," returned Mrs. Blackburn enthusiastically, while

she held out her two huge hands for him to shake. "I won't kiss you," chuckled she, "because I dare say you had rather that that were done by deputy."

Not to contradict a lady and his grandmother-in-law-elect to boot, John applied to the proxy thus indicated upon the spot, who executed the order accordingly, though not without some modest diffidence.

"Deary me!" continued the old woman approvingly, "how much better is this, Ellen—a hard-working, well-to-do young fellow, with his nice little income, and house with eight rooms—not more than you will want in time, young people, I dare say—than any of those fancy matches which your grandfather is always inventing for you, with the great folks of Derbyshire! A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush—that's my motto. I've lived on hopes too long myself not to know it's but lean meat. There's some as likes castles in the air, but I'd exchange the very finest of them, with park and grounds complete, for an eight-roomed house built of Slogan stone! Money we have not to offer with your bride, John; but I am an old housewife, and shall be able to come and give you many a hint or two as to this and that, which will help to save, if not to get."

"Indeed, Mrs. Blackburn, we shall be glad to make use of any hint you may please to give us," returned John, whose naturally keen perceptions were entirely blunted for the time by the contiguity of his charmer, or he would surely not have thus surrendered hearth and home at discretion at the first blast of a grandmother-in-law's trumpet.

"You speak, I'm sure, most fair and kind," said the old woman; "and it's quite a pleasure to listen to such talk, after having nothing but complaints so long, and looking for nothing but disappointments: you shall have my good word, and welcome, with my husband, John Denton; and all I can say is, that if his answer is not 'yes' when you ask for our Ellen, he must be downright deprived of his wits. I thought him foolish enough in opposing you of old (for I have always stood your friend with him); but now, if he objects to you still, being in such an excellent position, I shall get out of all patience, and speak my mind right out. However, let us hope he will not thus fly in the face of Providence."

"Amen!" answered Denton with a grave smile. "But at all events, I do not think he will oppose himself to our happiness, for a certain reason, for which I should otherwise—for his sake—be sorry. I have heard to-day that young Mr. Richard Blackburn is engaged to be married."

"They Blackburns are always for marrying early," said the old lady bitterly. "But there, it's not for me to complain," added she with a sigh. "I will do Anthony the justice to say that, during all his trouble, he has never once reproached me, but only his own unnatural kin—Going to marry, is he? and without a father

to say him nay to whomsoever he chooses. *She* will not be flattered with hopes of being a grand lady, and then find herself even worse off than the poor stock from which she sprang. Her boys will be brought up delicately, out of the reach of all temptation—leastways, to do such things as the law takes count of." Here the old woman's rough tones became strangely soft and pitiful, and her eyes filled with tears. "There's a verse in the Bible somewhere as says that 'The destruction of the poor is their poverty;' I wonder whether the rich ever read it, or know what it means."

Denton and Ellen kept silence; but the latter rose, and put her arms about her grandmother's neck, and kissed her.

"You're a good girl, Ellen," said the old woman quietly. "Your father was a good man—too good for this world—and you take after him. But all of us are not born so gentle and enduring. Even John here, had he been tried as some has been tried—"

"Nay, grandmother, why should we talk of these things now!" pleaded the young girl.

"Ah, why, indeed," responded Mrs. Blackburn; "why think of the absent and the erring, when all was going so smoothly with ourselves? That is what your grandfather says—although, Heaven knows, it is not because things go so smoothly with *him*; sixty-eight, and nothing saved against the poor-house—"

"What!" interrupted Denton suddenly. "Do you think it possible, Mrs. Blackburn, that I should permit those who had brought up my darling here so well and loyally, to come to such a pass as that? For the future, when you think upon your granddaughter, I beg of you to remember that you have a grandson also."

"I thank you, John Denton, but I have a son of my own alive," was the cold reply; and with that Mrs. Blackburn stepped firmly across the room, and went out at the open door, while the two young people looked at one another with mutual embarrassment. The poor woman's pride supported her until she was out of their sight and hearing; but as soon as she reached the little gully of which we have spoken, and which was the only place of concealment for miles around, she sat down beneath one of the mountain-ashes, and sobbed as though her heart would break.

"Oh, Willy, Willy," cried she, wringing her large gaunt hands, "why is it I can not give them the lie, when men speak evil against you, and why must a stranger and not you be your parents' prop?"

As she sat moaning thus with her face in her hands, and rocking herself to and fro, she was unconscious of the approach of a little ragged boy, who came whistling leisurely up the glen. He addressed her twice, and even shook her arm before he could gain her attention. "Here's a letter for you, missis," said he, holding out a mis- sive which had not a little suffered from contact with his dirty hands.

"For me?" cried she, snatching at it eagerly. "Oh, is it from my Willy?"

"How should I know, unless I read it?" answered the young gentleman scornfully. "And I think I ought to get summat extra for that. The postman says as how you were to pay me fourpence—'cause you're beyond the delivery. Mr. Blackburn always pays that, he says, for all his letters, and it don't come to a thousand a year neither even at that price."

"I'll go in and get the money, my lad," said Mrs. Blackburn, staring at the envelope she held tightly in her hand, and too deeply lost in thought to be cognizant of the small messenger's impertinence. "Who can be writing to Anthony?" muttered she. "It is surely the same hand that wrote the news of Richard Blackburn's death, and like it, it has a black rim!" As she looked up thoughtfully, she beheld far across the moor the form of John Denton striding swiftly away in the direction of Slogan. "That's well," mused she. "I could never have kept it from him that something had come. How my poor hand shakes, and how my knees tremble under me!"

"Come, missis; I was told not to give up the letter without the fourpence," resumed the shrill voice of the boy. "You must please to fork out the money."

"You shall have sixpence, if you'll only wait a minute," gasped the old woman; "that will be twopence for yourself." Then she fell to turning the letter over and over, and feeling it about. "It has something in it," said she softly, "or it must be a very long letter, and folks don't write long letters to beggars like us." Then she looked upward to the blue sky, and into her eyes came an ineffable tenderness that brought back to them for an instant their beauty of half a century ago.

"If Anthony is right after all," ejaculated she—"oh dear, if he is really right, my Willy will come back to us again!" and still keeping her gaze fixed upon the letter, she slowly turned towards the cottage.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LETTER FROM DERBYSHIRE.

WHEN Mrs. Blackburn got within-doors, she found Ellen with her elbows on the window-sill, staring through the diamond panes, as though a beloved object could be beheld by refraction, even though it had passed the range of the horizon.

"It is a good wind that blows nobody ill," thought her grandmother; "Mr. John Denton is like to lose his mistress if Anthony gets his own.—Ellen," said she, laying her hand upon the young girl's head, who started and blushed at her touch, "there's a letter come for grandfather."

"Indeed, grandmother: what a pity that John has gone?"

The old woman smiled.

"I mean," stammered Ellen, blushing again, "because he could have taken grandfather his letter."

"That may have been as though a school-boy should carry the cane with which he is to be beaten to the master's hands," observed Mrs. Blackburn gravely.

"I do not understand you, grandmother," said Ellen with wondering eyes.

"No, child; and perhaps there may be no need that you ever should. But listen—if, at least, you can hear any thing but that handsome young fellow's last words, which are ringing in your ears like marriage-bells, I know."

"What is it, grandmother? How strange you look! how your eyes glisten! Are you well?"

"Am I well?" repeated the old woman passionately. "What a life I must have led these many years, if, when one seed of hope springs up in my withered heart, and makes my face to shine, folks think I have the fever!—Yes, I am well, child, and very well; that is if *this* be well;" and she placed the letter just received in the girl's hand. "Do you not recognize the handwriting?"

Ellen shook her head.

"What? do so many letters, then, come to Moor Cottage," continued Mrs. Blackburn excitedly, "that you can not tell one from the other? To be sure, I forgot that John Denton writes whenever he can not come to see your pretty face. But I tell you there may be something in this letter worth fifty of your John Dentons, with his house of eight rooms, and his two hundred pounds a year to boot."

"Worth fifty John Dentons!" ejaculated the young girl, with the air of one who says, "fifty millions," and endeavors in vain to picture to herself so fabulous a sum.

"Yes, child," pursued the old woman; "and if you were not crazed with love, you would know what I mean at once. This letter is from the family lawyer—the Redcombe lawyer—the same who wrote to us, only a year ago, to say that Richard Blackburn was dead; and this, you see, has a black border and a black seal, as that had."

"Do you think that poor young gentleman—his son—is dead then also?"

"I *hope* he is, child.—Poor young gentleman! He was never poor; he never knew what it was to fare hardly, and work for pence, while youth and health were stealing away. *Poor*, indeed! he that was rolling in ill-gotten wealth, while your grandfather and I were *here*!" and she looked round with scorn at the bare walls of the cottage.

"That was not his fault, grandmother," pleaded Ellen gently, "for you know that his first act, when his father died, was to offer to assist us."

"Yes, to assist us out of our own money; that was a fine thing to do, indeed!" The speaker delivered herself of this last remark with the greater bitterness, because she herself, on

the principle of half a loaf being better than no bread, had been for accepting the young gentleman's proffered aid, a suggestion to which old Anthony would not listen. Her granddaughter, though well aware of this circumstance, was not so imprudent as to recall it to her; she contented herself with quietly saying: "But how do you know what is in the letter, grandmother?"

"How do I know! Why, for what else can it be, except to say that the lad's dead, that Mr. Moffat writes? He promised your grandfather to do so, you know, whenever any thing of importance occurred in the family."

"But why should he not write, then, to tell us that young Mr. Richard was engaged to be married, which John himself heard to-day on Slogan?"

"I never thought of that," said the old woman, falling into rather than sitting down upon a chair. "Alack, this is worse than all! To be so buoyed up as I was, and now to be sunk deeper than ever!" Her voice, so jubilant, and even fierce, had at once returned to its old hoarse and hopeless tone; the gleam of her eyes was quenched; she looked ten years older than she had done a minute before, as the tears rolled down her furrowed cheeks without a sob.—"But why should the letter be in mourning?" observed she eagerly after a little silence.

"Well, grandmother, Mr. Moffat himself may be in mourning, for all we know."

"Ay, that's true," remarked the old woman sadly. "Every body dies but them as ought to die."

"Would you please to give me that sixpence?" observed a shrill voice at the cottage door. "I promised to be back at the stable at four o'clock, 'cause some ladies and children has hired donkeys, and I'm the donkey boy."

"It's the lad who brought the letter," explained Mrs. Blackburn. "I promised him twopence extra, because I thought it was sure to be good news; and now I wish he had never come with it at all."

"Come, none of that reading first, and then not paying," began this irrepressible youth; when, suddenly catching sight of the young girl, his countenance fell, and he added in tones that were meant to be respectful: "I beg your parding, Miss Ellen; I did not know as you were at home."

"That is no reason why you should be impudent, Jemmy," observed Ellen. "My teaching at school does not seem to have done you much good, I fear, since you are so rude."

"Oh yes, miss, it did, leastways so long as you was doin' on it. But we ain't got no such teacher now: and besides now I'm a donkey-boy, I don't go to school at all."

"Send him away, send him away!" cried Mrs. Blackburn querulously. "I have twopence here, and the other fourpence must be taken out of your father's box yonder, which holds grandfather's 'bacco money.'"

"There is only threepence in the box, grandmother."

"Alack! nor more there is. I forgot it was the end of the week.—Look here, lad; here is siffence for thee; and instead of the other penny, I will cut some bread and cheese, and give thee a draught of milk.—Dear, dear," muttered the old woman, "to part with money and good food, just to hear bad news that has been already told us!"

The boy had been fed and dismissed, and the afternoon was drawing on, but still Mrs. Blackburn sat in the rush-bottomed chair, her generally so active arms quite still, and folded before her, and her eyes fixed on the letter, which had been placed on the mantel-shelf. Ellen sat by the window working nimbly with needle and thread, but without venturing to interrupt the silence.

At last, she rose, with a quiet "Here is grandfather home already;" and she went out on to the moor, as was her custom, to welcome the old man.

He received her, as he always did, with a loving kiss; but she strove in vain to discover, from his looks and manner, whether John Denton had spoken with him or not upon the matter which lay next her heart. Anthony's face was haggard, and his step more slow, she thought, than it was wont to be; but this could be easily accounted for if he had heard the news of Richard Blackburn's engagement. On the other hand, she knew enough of her grandfather not to expect to find him elated, as his wife had been, by the young overlooker's improved prospects, even though John should have proposed for her.

In the first place, the old man thought his Ellen a prize for any man; and in the second, he still clung with a tenacity that neither years nor disappointment could weaken, to the idea that he should one day enjoy his own again, as the squire of Blackburn Manor. It would have been ludicrous, were it not so mournful, to contrast with so grand an expectation the toilsome appearance, the mean attire, and even the usual topics of talk of him that held it. Whatever color his dreams might wear, his waking thoughts were clad in drab, concerned themselves only with the practical realities of life, unless, as by the stranger that day on Slogan, that chord chanced to be strack which always vibrated too powerfully for Anthony's self-command.

Had the pane been mended, was his first question, which Thomas the glazier had promised to step up and see about, in the window of the bedroom; and when he heard that it was not, his brow grew cloudier than before. The winter would come upon them, he foresaw, with that job still undone, and he should have again that rheumatism in his joints, which had crippled him so last spring.

"I trust not, grandfather," said the young girl affectionately; "and as for the window, if that remains as it is, and since I am not subject to rheumatism, grandmother and you shall have my room."

"To which we shall be all the more wel-

come," remarked the old man grimly, "because you hope to be elsewhere—eh, you jade?—where the panes of glass are sound."

"Indeed, grandfather—"

"There, there; don't tell stories, girl," interrupted Anthony pettishly. "I know all about it; Denton has been talking to me for an hour and more. I dare say he thinks it's a mighty generous thing to offer to marry a quarryman's daughter, he being the master of us all; but I can tell him—and indeed I did tell him—that Anthony Blackburn's granddaughter has as good blood in her veins—from one side, at least—as any girl in England, and may one day yet hold up her head with the highest. Two hundred a year, indeed! Why, unless young Richard has kicked it down—which is not very likely, since he is still a minor—there is four thousand a year in land about the Manor; and the Mosedale property, Mr. Moffat tells me, is worth ten times what it was, now that the town has sprung up."

"There is a letter come for you from Mr. Moffat, grandfather," said Ellen quietly, to whom the opportunity for thus interrupting the old man's recital of his possible greatness was welcome enough.

"I expected there would be," returned he coldly; "and my expectations, when at least misfortunes are anticipated, are generally realized. John Denton took care to tell me that young Richard is engaged to be married; but there's many a slip between the cup and the lip, and instead of the marriage-bed, the grave sometimes receives—"

"Nay, grandfather, do not talk like that; I am sure you do not mean it. You are too kind, too good—"

"Do I not, granddaughter?" And the old man stood still, while over his bearded face there stole a terrible look. "I tell you, that if by raising my finger—thus—I could save that young man's life—"

"Yes; but you would not take it! Oh, say you would not take it, grandfather?" pleaded the young girl passionately. "The seal of the letter is black, and there is black on the border of the envelope, and for all we know, we may be talking of one whom death has already taken."

"Black on the border!" cried the old man, his eyes lighting with sudden fire, and his limbs moving with hasty strides towards the cottage. "Where is the letter?—Where is it, wife, I say?"

"It is on the mantel-shelf next to your 'baccobox, Anthony; and we took out your last three pennies, besides two of my own, to pay the lad as brought it, and, until Saturday, we have not a farthing in the house. Yet it brings nought but bad news, Ellen tells me—"

"It brings the best of news," exclaimed the old man excitedly. "I say it must bring it.—Get me a chair, Nelly, for I feel my head go round; there is something dancing before my eyes, and I can not make out a word. Read it aloud, child. But no; I can't bear that: let us know the news at once in a single word."

"Mr. Richard Blackburn is dead," said Ellen in a solemn voice.

"Then justice is done at last," ejaculated Anthony, clapping his hands. "At last, after fifty years!"

"And there is money in the letter—notes!" exclaimed Mrs. Blackburn, snatching both them and it from her granddaughter's hand. "There is fifty pounds, in case we may have present need of money, he writes, and to defray expenses on our journey home."

"Home!" repeated the old man. "Home at last!" Then his lips moved without a sound.

"It was applepox, and quite sudden," observed Mrs. Blackburn, looking up from the letter. "You know we were once told that he had a short neck. How I wish that we had got this money in golden pounds: it don't look half so much in paper!—does it?"

The sight of such an unaccustomed sum within her very palm, prevented all speculation on the future; the letter itself, with its contents, was disregarded in comparison with such a present gain.

"What a terrible blow for the young girl who was engaged to be married to poor Mr. Richard!" exclaimed Ellen sorrowfully, her genuine regret doubtless increased by the position in which she herself stood with respect to the young overlooker.

"My darling Nelly," said the old man softly, "let me kiss you! You are a good girl, and Heaven has rewarded you for it: that charming face of yours has now the fortune which always seemed by rights to belong to it. Within six months, you will be the belle of the county. I wish you joy, my dear, with all my heart."

"Thank you, grandfather," replied Ellen timidly. "I hope that you and grandmother will find all the happiness from this change of position which you anticipate;" and with that she glided from the room into her own bedchamber.

"I am afraid she will hanker after that John Denton still," said the old man slowly; "and though, of course, he is not to be thought of now, it is lucky I did not give him a definite promise."

"It is not that, Anthony, which makes Nelly sad," said Mrs. Blackburn earnestly; "it is the thought that we are such a divided family: you don't know how she frets about that. Surely, now that you have got your own again, you will forgive and forget."

"I can not forget, woman," returned he gloomily; "the remembrance of which you speak forces itself upon me now with tenfold bitterness. But I will endeavor to forgive."

An hour ago, one would have said that such news as they had just received must needs have made every member of the little household happy. Yet Anthony Blackburn, unable to dismiss from his mind the recollection which his wife had just evoked, took his way towards the little sea-side town with no very radiant looks; and Ellen, filled with sad forebodings, lay on her lit-

tle bed with her face to the wall, too sad to shed a tear.

Mrs. Blackburn alone seemed to feel these sudden rays of the sunshine of prosperity strike to her very core. "She could sit down to nothing," as she expressed it, from sheer delirious joy, but moved briskly about the cottage, again and again stopping to smooth out the two bank-notes which her husband had left with her (he had gone to get change for the rest), and to murmur to herself that her Willie was coming home, for good, to be a gentleman.

CHAPTER V.

COMING HOME.

It is not many days since that eventful letter arrived, for which Mrs. Blackburn had disbursed all the money in the family coffers; yet the cottage on the moor is tenantless; and a carriage-and-four is conveying its three inmates to the home that is so old to two of them, and so new to the third, as fast as the steepness of the Derbyshire hills will permit. The railway has brought them no nearer than within twelve miles of the manor; and to Mrs. Blackburn, eagerly desirous of beholding the great house of which she is at last the mistress, this distance appears interminable. Prosperity, if it has already taught her impatience, has, however, worked wonders for her externally; her attire, by no means sombre in its tints—for Anthony has peremptorily forbidden the least pretense of mourning for his deceased nephew, and she is far from wishing to be disobedient in this respect—becomes her well; the splendor, at which she herself would fain have aimed, has been judiciously mitigated by her granddaughter's good taste, but enough remains for striking effect. The best remedy for her impatience seems to consist in regarding closely the texture of her costly mantle, or stroking the unaccustomed gloves that conceal her red rough hands. Beside her sits her husband, his eyes restlessly roving from object to object on the road, which, with every revolution of the wheels, seems to grow more familiar to him; still, every now and then, his recollection is evidently at fault; and this seems to pain him. He will then stand up and put a question or two to the nearest post-boy, albeit he generally receives little satisfaction from that source. The postboy has not a map of the district around Blackburn Manor, fifty years old, before his mind's eye, so as to be able to appreciate minute changes, although he can indicate important ones. Thus after having reached the top of a long winding hill, from which a vast extent of country could be seen. "What's that?" cried Anthony eagerly, pointing to where from some far distant valley rose the smoke of a thousand fires.

"Why, Mosedale, sir," answered the man, turning round in his saddle with great astonishment, while the panting horses rested for a

minute. "There's twenty thousand folks and more lives down yonder now, sir."

"Ah, to be sure, I had forgotten," returned Anthony with the color in his ancient cheeks. "But that high mound yonder to the left is surely new?" He pointed to the verge of the far-stretching purple moor, where something resembling earthworks seemed to have been recently thrown up.

"That is the new reservoir, sir, for supplying the town with water. They do say it cost fifty thousand pounds."

Anthony nodded gravely, and his bearded face grew sad. The last time he had stood upon that moor—gun in hand, and full of strength and youth—not only was there no such mound to be seen, but no cloud of smoke hung over yonder valley. He felt like Rip Van Winkle after his long sleep; and, indeed, his condition was even worse, for not only were his people changed beyond recognition, and mostly by death itself, but the places in which they had dwelt had altered also. He felt somehow ashamed of his ignorance, and put his next question with a faltering voice, and in a form that admitted of retreat: "That is not Curlew Hall with the tall turret, is it?"

"Yes, indeed, it is, sir; though I dare say the new wing, built by the late Squire, makes it look strange; and yet that must have been done these ten years. They do say he crippled himself with the expense; but young Mr. Herbert would have run through the money anyhow, so it's just as well spent in bricks and mortar."

The carriage moved rapidly on, and the observations of the communicative postboy were thereby cut short; but they awoke a train of reflection in the old man, who lay back as if fatigued, regarding with half-shut eyes the pale features of his beautiful granddaughter who sat opposite to him.

"That is the young Herbert Stanhope," ran his thoughts, "whom I saw on Slogan the other day, and whose grandfather was once my old friend. He has a good heart, I think, even if he be a spendthrift, since he offered an old quarryman a drink from his flask. Perhaps it was for the sake of Nelly's pretty face; but if so, so much the better. The Curlew and Blackburn estates join at the Longacre. His family is the oldest in the county, except our own; and if he is in want of money, there will be less of scruple."

Some unpleasant thought had here arisen in the old man's brain, for he sighed heavily, and once more raised himself and looked around, as though to avoid dwelling upon it.

"We surely ought to see Redcombe from here, man, ought we not?" inquired he. "One used to catch the church-tower from all points of the moor, I thought."

"Ay, sir, but that was before the woods grew," bawled the postboy. "You don't see neither church nor manor now till you comes close upon 'em."

Even the very face of nature, then, was al-

tered beyond recognition: changes such as the rapid growth of Mosedale—which had much enriched the Blackburn estate, by-the-by—the old man had expected to see, but this strangeness of the material features of the landscape was entirely unlooked for. The home picture which he had had before his eyes for so many years in imagination, and which he had thought to see realized that afternoon, did not, then, even exist, but had been swept away with the generation which was familiar with it. Anthony ventured upon no more questions, lest he should learn that any of his usurping kinsfolk might have altered the Manor-house itself. But as the vehicle rapidly descended into the valley, where the village nestled beneath spreading elms, field after field was passed that he knew well, farm after farm, which, though with a new outbuilding here and there, were still very recognizable; the open green with apparently the self-same groups of children on it, and the same flocks of geese that he had seen there when he last beheld it; then the ancient ivy-covered church unchanged by a mere fifty additional years, and from which those bells were pealing blithely for his return, which had been forbidden to hail his marriage-day; and last the Manor-house itself, no stick nor stone of which seemed otherwise than the exile had figured it: perhaps the truth was, though Memory had enriched the picture with her softened lights, Time too, on his part, had invested the reality with his mellow charms.

Blackburn Manor was an Elizabethan mansion, not indeed of imposing size, but still of large proportions; with a broad stone terrace (upon which the peacocks strutted and screamed), approached by broad stone steps, with urns of stone ablaze with scarlet flowers. The whole face of the house seemed veiled from the evening sun by a network of greenery, out of which peeped many a blossom of rose and passion-flower; and upon the terrace balcony, as on the steps, the geraniums shone like lines of festal fire. These last had indeed been planted by order of the late Squire, to please the eye of his betrothed, but they now seemed to flash a welcome on the new-comers. A ring of "ducking" villagers at the gates, and an obsequious courtesy from the lodge-keeper, was all they had hitherto met with in the way of greeting. The country-folk were puzzled as to the course of conduct they should pursue. Was joy at the reception of old Squire Anthony entirely to erase regret for young Squire Richard's untimely demise? or was a decent middle course to be adopted? In the carriage-sweep, however, and on the terrace steps, there was a considerable concourse of tenantry and others assembled to do their new master honor, who, the king being dead, were prepared to say, "Long live the king!" Mr. Mowbray Moffat, an ancient personage, much bowed in the shoulders, but with keen intelligent eyes, stood at the head of them.

"We are glad to see you back again amongst us, Squire, after so many years," was his grave

salutation; and "Glad to see you, sir," was echoed respectfully around.

There was no cordiality in the sound, however; nor indeed was it to be expected. Richard Blackburn, a youth of really noble promise, had been a general favorite; the heart of a landlord of seventy was not likely to be so impressionable as that of one of nineteen, and his dependents naturally enough regretted the change. Moreover, there were scarcely half a dozen present who had ever set eyes on Anthony before, and of course not one who recognized him. Still, they all knew he had been badly treated; had heard from their mothers' lips the story of his dismissal from his ancestral home, and pitied him. It interested even the dullest to behold by his side the woman for whose sake he had sacrificed so much and for so long.

"She is for certain most uncommon lovely," muttered one young tenant-farmer thoughtfully.

"Tut, man, that's his granddaughter," replied his neighbor, laughing under his breath.

"Ay, true," returned the other slowly, and with that imperviousness to ridicule which seems peculiar to the profession of agriculture: "I had forgotten it was fifty year ago. But I dare say the old one was a dainty morsel in her time."

"Hush, man; the Squire is going to give us a speech;" and, indeed, instead of taking advantage of the open chaise door, and the score of outstretched hands that offered themselves to help him down, the old man had got upon the carriage-seat, and was beckoning with his hand for silence.

"Neighbors and friends," said he in a hoarse voice, "I thank you for your welcome. You ought to know me well, though you do not. But that is not my fault, nor yours. I thought to stand here, thanking you for drinking my good health, as your young Squire, when I should have come of age, just fifty years ago. That was when Mr. Moffat yonder was as young as any man here, and long before most of you were born. I am like a dead man out of mind to almost all of you." Here the old man paused, overcame with emotion, and a sympathetic murmur arose from his auditors. "I can not expect that you should entertain much regard for a man of whom you have probably heard nothing but ill from those who have wronged him. But I was sent forth from this place a wanderer on the face of the earth, like Cain, for no crime, but because I fell in love with my wife. Or, rather, I was like Esau of old, with Ferdinand and Charles and Richard—all Jacobs—for my false brethren. That is not your concern, you would say. But when I thus revisit the home of my fathers, through the good-will of no man, but by the judgment of God, I can not but feel some bitterness. However, what has been ill for me will be good for you, I hope, inasmuch as I have known, like some of you, what it is to be poor, to work with these arms for bread." Again a murmur arose from the crowd around, and one man cried out "Shame!" "Yes, my

man," continued the squire, turning towards the spot from which the voice proceeded; "it was indeed shameful in those who were the cause, for they not only drove me to work, in which there is no shame, but to want. That seems strange to you, does it not, that the rightful owner of Blackburn Manor, and his flesh and blood here, should stand in need of daily bread?" The old man pointed to Ellen, whose pale face, made paler by emotion, or perhaps apprehension of what her grandfather, in his passion against his brethren, might say, seemed to bear out the old man's words. "I swear to you that this tender, delicate girl beside me has been in need of bread." Every eye was turned towards her as he spoke, and very many were full of tears.

"Oh, grandfather," pleaded Ellen softly, "pray, pray say no more."

"Yes, my friends," continued he, "the things which we have suffered in our own persons are easily forgiven; but there are some wrongs—I say there are some crimes which even God does not pardon; at least, I have seen that he punishes those who commit them from generation to generation. This brings me to what I had in my mind from the first to say to you. I hope to be a good landlord, a good neighbor, a good friend to you all. In return, I would ask one favor of you. Do not speak to me—try to remember not to speak to me—of those persons who have preceded me here. I will never forgive them, but I would fain forget them. I do not wish, if it be possible, ever again to hear their names."

These words, spoken so calmly, and with such earnest preciseness, seemed to freeze speech and motion in those who heard them; not a voice was raised, not an arm was stretched forth to aid him, as the old man descended from the seat, and quitted the carriage. As if afraid of that stern bearded face and those implacable eyes, the crowd drew back on both sides; and through the living lane thus formed, the Squire slowly climbed the terrace steps, and passed through the open door into his home.

His wife and granddaughter followed more rapidly, each leaning on an arm of Mr. Moffat.

CHAPTER VI.

THE FAMILY PORTRAITS.

MR. MOFFAT joined the family circle at dinner on the night of their arrival at the Manor. He had been the only link between Anthony and his old home—the only man who had given himself the trouble to communicate with the exile during his long banishment, and he now reaped the fruits of this in the cordial friendship of the new squire. At the time of the latter's disgrace, Mowbray Moffat had been articulated clerk to his uncle Robert, who had himself, in the character of family lawyer, made some effort to mollify Russell Blackburn's wrath against his eldest born; but when he found interference

worse than useless, and also, at his client's direction, had drawn up the deed which seemed to put Anthony's succession to the estate beyond human probability, the elder Moffat had taken no further interest in him, and even cautioned his nephew against the manifestation of such a feeling. But Mowbray had written, though guardedly and cautiously enough, whenever any event of importance had taken place at the manor; and even these measured phrases of good-will had been very grateful to their recipient. A little kindness goes a great way when we are poor; nay, the very remembrance of us (whom so many have forgotten) appears a kindness. Whether it was genuine pity or only prudent forethought that impelled the man of parchments thus to act, is doubtful. He certainly ran some risk with at least two of his employers—tyrant Russell and spendthrift Ferdinand—who had strictly commanded all relations with the Disgrace to the Family to cease; not, it must be confessed, by reason of Anthony's first offense alone, but from his subsequent conduct. The letters he wrote to his father were not of a conciliatory character; and that which on the occasion of the old man's death, he addressed to his usurping successor, was really quite a curiosity in the way of vituperation. But in course of years, passionate indignation had given place to patient watching for retribution—hoarded hate. He ceased to rave of his own wrongs, or to make comments upon the proceedings of his detested kinsman; but on the demise of each brother he had put in a written protest against the continuance of the injustice which their common father had perpetrated.

To these letters, Mr. Moffat had been instructed, on the part of his clients, to make no reply; but he had always written, on his own account, to express a decent sorrow for Anthony's misfortune; that is, for his banishment, not for the trials which poverty imposed upon him, for of those he knew nothing for certain, whatever he may have guessed. Anthony's pride prevented him from making that disclosure by letter, which his passion, excited by the sight of his old home, had just compelled him so openly to proclaim. The lawyer perhaps had his own reasons for not inquiring too nearly into his correspondent's actual circumstances; however willing to offer sympathy, and even advice, he might have shrunk from advancing money out of his own pocket to supply Anthony's necessities—the security being so exceedingly problematical. Of course, he knew that his old friend—for they had been playmates together, or rather he had been the young Squire's humble companion while the next brother, Ferdinand, was still in the nursery—was very poor; but the fact was not pressed upon his notice, and he was glad to ignore it. Perhaps, if he had known how poor the inmates of Moor Cottage had been—how small a sum would have seemed a fortune to them—he would have drawn his purse-strings readily enough. Of late, however, Mr. Moffat might well have defended himself from the charge of want of

charity, upon the ground of fearing to wound Anthony's feelings—for it was upon the question of Richard Blackburn's affording his uncle pecuniary assistance that the lawyer and his present client had well-nigh quarrelled; Mr. Moffat had accompanied his employer's offer not only with an earnest entreaty that it should be accepted, but even with an encomium upon the young Squire's liberality and good-feeling; and this the resolute old quarryman had bitterly resented. Indeed, no communication had passed between them since that period, except the one letter that had apprised the old man of his nephew's death. Their meeting, therefore, at least upon one side, had had something of embarrassment; but the few earnest words of gratitude that accompanied the Squire's warm grip of salutation had at once put the lawyer at his ease.

"I am a stranger in my own home," the former had gone on to say, "and it is to you, to whom I have so long been indebted, that I must for the future look for aid of all kinds."

If Mr. Moffat had been aware of the company which his host had kept perforce for so many years, he would certainly have marvelled to hear him use such well-chosen words; but he remembered Anthony as having had the pleasantest voice and the most winning address of all the Blackburns, who, to say the truth, had been (with one other exception) a rough lot, both in speech and feeling. He marvelled, therefore, not at Anthony's comparative culture (though there was much else in him to wonder at), but at the lack of it in Mrs. Blackburn, which, indeed, throughout the repast was manifest enough. She partook of every dish, and every condiment which could be taken with them; she mixed her liquors in a really alarming manner; and in the intervals of the meal, she betook herself to balancing the silver forks upon her finger, with the relish of a person who partakes of an amusement for the first time. Moreover, though Mr. Moffat was well acquainted with the local dialect, her talk was sometimes utterly unintelligible to him; the fact being, that the family, in their earlier days of poverty, had been migratory, and the consequence, in Mrs. Blackburn's case, had been a combination of *patois*.

But the chief enigma of the little party to the astute man of business, very desirous of solving the three social problems before him, was Miss Ellen. Her features were not only well formed, but possessed that softened beauty which belongs in general to those who have been brought up delicately; who have experienced that hot-house training, the result of which is mistaken for that of aristocratic birth. Her hands were as white, if not quite so smooth, as those of any young lady in the county; and though her speech was more elaborate and stiff, the words were better selected.

The dinner conversation was not, however, general, but chiefly maintained by Mr. Moffat and his host; the latter asking question after question respecting this man and that, whose

face of fifty years ago had been familiar to him; and the latter, nine times out of ten, replying, with a shake of his white head; "He is dead and gone, sir."

And all this time the servants waited with wondering eyes, speculating upon their master's past, and endeavoring to forecast from it their own future. It was already evident to them that they would not, as some had expected, have every thing their own way with him; yet he had only once spoken angrily, when he bade them let that day be the last on which he should see them in mourning apparel. Any reference, however undemonstrative, to his immediate predecessors at the Manor-house seemed intolerable to him. The dining-room was hung with full-length portraits of his father and brothers, and it was observed that an angry flush came over his face whenever his eye wandered towards them during the meal; but when it was over, and the ladies had withdrawn and the obsequious butler was placing a bottle of rare port upon the table, with a few words of respectful encomium, he was arrested by the startling words from the Squire; "Get a ladder, man, at once, and take all those pictures down."

While host and guest were sipping their wine in silence, this accordingly was done; and some half-dozen huge frames, with their contents, were soon standing in a line against the wall, like criminals awaiting execution. They had most of them fine handsome features, but of an animal type.

"That is my father, of course," observed Anthony coldly, as he pointed to a burly figure with puffed cheeks and sensual chin, who occupied the middle place. There was a twinkle in the eye that hinted of humor, or perhaps only of the pleasures of the flesh, but it was marred by a obliquity of vision which imparted malignancy; indeed, it was easy to imagine it becoming "a damned disinheriting countenance," if irritated by opposition, and such it unquestionably seemed to the present beholder. "This must have been taken after my time," continued he, rising and confronting the canvas, as though it were a thing of life; "yet I should know it anywhere. He was a hard man, except where his own vices were concerned, and then he was weak enough.—Was it not so, Mr. Moffat?"

"Indeed, sir," stammered the lawyer, straightening his stiff white cravat, "I had no certain knowledge of the Mr. Russell Blackburn. My uncle Robert, as you were aware, was the family lawyer throughout almost all your father's life."

"Ay, true," replied Anthony, cynically; "and of course you never heard his character discussed. With the rest of this godly company, however, you had a closer acquaintance than myself.—Is that my brother Ferdinand?"

His finger pointed to the portrait of a man of five-and-twenty, attired in a jockey's dress, and about to mount a sleek and well-bred horse. His hand was on the reins, but his face

was turned round to the spectators, as though giving some final order before he set out.

"Yes, sir, that is Squire Ferdinand; and very like. He is painted with his famous mare, that won so many steeple-chases. I recollect her well. She realized four thousand pounds in stakes in a single year, though, it is true, she cost her owner thrice the money in lost bets. He would back her against any thing, and so would all about here." The lawyer, ready enough to exchange the dangerous topic of humanity for that of horse-flesh, or, perhaps, since he had some turn for sport, being really interested in it, waxed eloquent upon his glossy theme. "She was a genuine beauty; and though, as you see, she had one white stocking, which was thought a blemish, her owner would never allow she was not perfect. She had a stall and a paddock to herself; two grooms to wait upon her; and during one very severe season, the Squire had the straw-yard roofed in for her, so that she might take her exercise under cover. Let me see, which winter was it?"

"Perhaps it was that same winter," broke in Anthony hoarsely, "when we nearly lost our Ellen, because coal was too dear for us to buy. Yes, sir, we starved and shivered, while yonder scoundrel lavished gold—my gold—upon his pampered pet."

"She broke his neck, for him, poor fellow, at last," pleaded the lawyer softly, "as I wrote to let you know."

"Was that the mare that did it?" ejaculated Anthony excitedly. "Then I am sorry that I grudged her aught. I will have a statuette of silver cast of her, and underneath it written: 'The Queen of Horses.' Or stay; I'll have this rascal painted out, and the mare left; by Heaven, I will." The vehemence of the old man's passion was ever more terrible to witness than to listen to; it seemed to go well nigh to choke him before it found vent in words; and full a minute passed before he got the mastery over himself and it; then turning to the neighbor-picture, he inquired contemptuously: "Whose brat is that?"

"That is young Ferdinand, sir, who died of the fever."

"Humph!—And this is Charles the Sot, I suppose?"

"It is your brother Charles, sir," answered the lawyer quietly. "If he was fond of the bottle, at least he had no weakness for the fair sex. There was not a woman-servant in the Manor, nor one admitted within the lodge-gates for the five years he ruled the place. A most eccentric personage."

"An idiot, sir," ejaculated Anthony, "who would have driven out his days in some asylum, if delirium-tremens had not cut them short.—That is the fisher-fellow, Richard, I suppose? And that his son, who died here this day fortnight, eh? Now all these rogues shall burn together, at once." And the old Squire reached out a trembling hand and grasped the bell-rope.

"I pray you consider, sir," interposed Mr.

Moffat hastily. "If you are so ill-resolved, at least do nothing in such sudden heat. Although these folk were not your friends, still you were kin, and blood is thicker than water, or is, at all events, so held to be in these parts. Your neighbors here would resent such conduct deeply, they would indeed, sir."

"The neighbors?—You mean the flatterers, the lickspittles, all those who fawned on this precious brotherhood! What care I whether they are pleased or displeased!"

"For your own part, nothing, sir, doubtless. But for Miss Ellen's sake, you should wish to be on good terms with the country-side. To burn these portraits of the men they knew so well, would bring you into much discredit. Your kin are dead and gone to their account, and hate should not be pushed beyond the grave. Besides, there are some among them who have done you no evil turn, nor thought to do it. The boy Ferdinand here, for instance, who perhaps never heard your name; and this young Richard—if you would but have believed it, sir—no better-meaning and more generous lad ever drew breath. His people here adored him."

"His people! They were mine."

"The people of the village, I mean, sir; they did not know, remember—although you knew so well—but that they were his people; nor did he himself. He understood nothing of the rights of the matter, nor your wrongs. Do you think his father yonder told him: 'We usurp this place, which should be your uncle Anthony's?'"

"And why did not you tell him?" inquired the Squire, facing round upon his guest. "You knew." "I did say much that moved him greatly, sir. You know yourself how instantly he acted upon it; and although you spurned his offer, I still think—"

"Ah, I see," interrupted Anthony; "you feared to tell the truth, else justice, reparation even, so far as he could make it, might have been done at last. You, then, are to blame, not he.—Among that nest of rogues, this Richard, then, was honest at the core. He has a comely face enough, now that I look into it, and a pleasant smile."

"He has indeed, sir; and if I were one given to compliment, I could tell you how old folk about here used to say they found young Squire Anthony reproduced in this same boy. Indeed, I have often seemed to sit beside you when I have sat with him at this very table. He had, like you, his mother's gentle nature, rather than his father's. He fell in love too, just as you did, when he was quite a boy."

Squire Anthony had sat down in front of this likeness of his former self, and was regarding it attentively. He did not hear one half of what the lawyer said. The fifty years that lay between him and boyhood seemed all swept away, and he was once more a lad. What airy dreams he had then indulged in! what rose-tinted visions of life had his fancy painted! How passion had swayed him! It was in that very room, whither, on the occasion of her taking her new

place, his Mary had come to have a few words of advice from her mistress, that he had first seen his charmer in that house (he had only known her by sight as the acknowledged beauty of the hamlet, and his mother's favorite pupil in the village school, before). He even remembered where she stood, close by the window yonder, with her hands modestly folded; and the pattern of the simple gown she wore, and the color of the ribbons in her bonnet. It was a foolish enough thing to do, but he had fallen in love with the new waiting-maid as honestly as ever duke did with duchess. He had never meant otherwise than honorably towards her. And while it lasted, what a transport it had been! He had not inherited the gross animal nature of his father; but his affections were very strong, his heart was tender, his voice and air were winning. All the beauty and physical grace that had departed from him so long were seen once more in the portrait on which his eyes had been fixed. They were now cast down upon the shining table, on which quite another picture was mirrored—an aged, furrowed face, white hair, white beard, and eyes that gazed dimly forth from beneath white bushy brows.

"You are right, Moffat," said he thoughtfully, and after a long pause: "the pictures must not be burned, though I will not have them here. Let them be put away out of my sight, till I am dead and gone like the rest—all but young Richard's there: he shall have the place of honor above the mantel-piece. If the lad had lived, and taken a liking to his cousin Ellen— But there; he had a sweetheart of his own, you told me."

"Yes, sir; Miss Lucy Waller; a sweet girl, whose father until lately sat in the House for Mosedale."

"What a handsome pair they would have made!" mused the old squire, quite unconscious of the lawyer's reply. "Both Blackburns too: I could have made a point of that." Then suddenly: "How do you think her looking, Moffat?"

"Miss Ellen, sir!"

"Of course; who else?"

"Indeed, sir, she is very beautiful, though, I should fear, somewhat delicate. She will cause many a heartache in the county with those large soft eyes of hers, doubtless; since, I suppose, if it is not an impertinence to ask it, she is fancy free as yet?"

"Yes, yes," said Anthony hastily. "She has formed no engagement; you have my leave to say that much. To see her married well, and happily, would make amends to me for much that I have suffered.—You hear her singing in the drawing-room even now. Yes, that is my Nelly's voice; and, as you say, as clear as any bird's.—If you have done your wine, sir, let us bid the ladies."

CHAPTER VII.

BENEATH THE OLD ROOF-TREE.

THE Manor-house was not without its memories for Mrs. Blackburn as well as her husband, although they were of a different sort. She had dwelt as a servant where she was now the mistress: she had returned in triumph across the threshold from which she had been driven with shame. It was no wonder, therefore, that she wore an air of triumph. A powerful ally, Death, had declared himself upon her side, and at last had conquered all her foes for her; for the Blackburns—fathers, and sons, and grandsons—were all enemies in her eyes: cruel and unnatural in their treatment of her husband—insolent and cruel to herself.

She had made a hasty tour of the house before dinner, and insisted on her granddaughter's accompanying her. The handsome sitting-rooms had been expatiated upon, and in one of them, the library, she had whispered (it was one of the few touches of pathos she exhibited throughout): "It was here that your grandfather confessed his love for me, and gave me his first kiss. Ah," sighed she, stepping up to the old oak-framed mirror that stood over the fireplace, "I was as bonnie a lassie as thou, Nelly, then, and a deal healthier-looking. But rheum and wrinkles is what we must all come to."

In the best bedroom, which had been prepared for Anthony and herself, her reflections were of a more agreeable nature: "It was here, Nelly, that I waited on my lady—and a kind-hearted loving creature she was, with a brute for a husband. He was a bad man every way. Alack! how I have heard him bang and swear in that dressing-room, while I have been doing madam's hair. And how she would start and color as our faces met in this glass."

"Did she know how you and grandfather loved one another?" asked Ellen, with an interest which she had been hitherto far from evincing in any of the circumstances of the day.

"Not at first, although she found it out before the Squire did. She tried her best to stop it—for which, indeed, I don't blame her; it is best in a general way for folks to marry in their own rank, you may depend on that, Nelly—but when she found Anthony quite set upon it, she addressed herself to me."

"And what did she say, grandmother?"

"Well, she spoke very fair, I will say. She owned that she was much averse to her son's marrying such a one as me. 'But it's better, in God's sight, that he seek to marry you,' said she, 'than seek your ruin.' (Poor thing, she knew more than people guessed of the wickedness that went on under her own roof.) She so moved me, indeed, with her kind words, that I almost made up my mind to give Anthony up; and I would have done so—yes, I do believe I would—rather than have got him turned out of house and home for my sake. But it was not in my power to stop that. Whether I had married him or not, that would have happened all

the same. He and his father spoke such bitter words to one another; and no wonder, so far as Anthony was concerned; why, you would scarce believe it! but that wicked old man, your great-grandfather—think of *that*, Nelly, and I alive to tell it!—if he had not had a wife already, would have married me himself!"

The young girl shuddered, as well she might. These reminiscences of vicious passion, told by the lips of age concerning one far older, and whom Death had so long taken, seemed to have a smack of the charnel.

But the narrator herself had no such qualms. "I only saw madam once after that dreadful quarrel," she went on. "Your grandfather and I were married then, and forbidden the house; but his mother wrote us word to meet her on a certain day in Redmoor Fir Grove, when Russell Blackburn was at York races. She looked white and thin as a ghost; and indeed she died within six months of that date; and if ever a broken heart was the cause of death, it was so with her. I thought she would never have unclosed her arms from Anthony's neck, they clung to him so at parting: he was her favorite son, as well as her eldest born, and she must have felt it was for the last time. I did not know then, as I know now, Nelly, what a bitter cup that was to drain; but I pitied her from the bottom of my heart. Besides, she had not a word of blame for me, nor even of warning; she had been such a good wife herself, that perhaps she had no idea of what some wives are; but she bade her son be true to me, even when the days should come, as they have long come, though I little thought of them at the time, when all the beauty that then gladdened him so in my face and form should have faded and gone."

"She must have been a good woman," sighed Ellen sympathically.

"Yes, wench—too good for this world. Another one in her place, not so good, might have done better. She did not make the most of herself even in appearance, as I have told her, in this very chamber, many a time. Hark! there's the first dinner-bell. The last time I heard it, and saw Anthony go down without me to take his place at table, I little thought it would be fifty years before I got my own. Well, better late than never; the tide has turned at last, though it is not at full yet; nor will be till my Willy has his rights. See, here is the girl coming to dress me; just as I used to come to madam, directly that bell rang."

Ellen partook of none of this triumph and exhilaration. She tried to be glad, for her grandfather's sake, that their prospects had been so marvellously changed for the better; but in her heart she was sorely grieved. If the thing could have been postponed till three months later, when she would have been John Denton's wife, than she might have welcomed this stroke of good fortune like the rest, although it would have always been in an inferior degree; for she did not care for wealth for its own sake, and of the advantages it bestows she had had no ex-

perience. At present she only knew that the acquisition of it had dispelled her brightest dream. Her grandfather had sternly commanded her to break off all relations with John Denton; such an engagement, he contended, to which, even under other circumstances, he had always refused his consent, had now become utterly incompatible with her position, and was to be no longer entertained.

Not even her strong sense of gratitude and filial respect towards her grandfather could induce her to send such tidings to the young engineer; but she had written him word that for the present his visits, and even his correspondence with her, must cease. The pair were doomed to test the strength of that constancy of which each had boasted; and though she feared no danger from the separation, she deeply felt the pain of it. The fact was, now that the barren hope to which Anthony Blackburn had clung for near half a century of toil had at last begun to bear, he was greedy for the full fruition of it. He wanted to be all his ancestors the squires of Blackburn Manor had been before him, and by the help of Ellen, to whom he was sincerely and devotedly attached, even something more. He was in secret much more solicitous to secure the good opinion of his new neighbors than he pretended to be, and we have seen that he was content, for the sake of it, even to forego some taste of the pleasures of revenge. He well knew that the attempt to recover his old position in the neighborhood would be a difficult one; that his own manners, address, and even language were not what they had been before he lost it; and that his wife would be totally unable to adapt herself to her altered fortunes. In the background, too, was a third member of the family, to whom we have not as yet been introduced, but who could not be kept away from Blackburn Manor forever, and who was likely to prove a still more formidable obstacle to his views.

Indeed, without Ellen's aid, the case was well nigh hopeless, and therefore it was that he threw in the scale against her love for Denton the full weight of his authority, and piled upon it all the considerations of gratitude and loyalty he could call to his aid. Without her, how could an old man (however pitiable for his misfortunes), and an old woman, whose audacity in wedding above her station had, in their opinion, deserved all the misery it had earned, recommend themselves to the proud and well-born folk, with whom he hoped once more to mix—even putting out of consideration that more serious hindrance to his efforts which for the present he might contrive to keep out of sight? But, on the other hand, with his beautiful granddaughter to help him, how altered was the case! A country-house that was the casket of such a jewel as Ellen Blackburn could not fail to be attractive. She had good blood in her veins, and looked and moved like a princess. She would be rich, for he would make her so. With whom, then, among untitled folk at least, might she not form

an alliance? and that once cemented, her husband's kin would stand shoulder to shoulder with her own, and help them to keep their place. Thoughts of this kind had begun to fill the old man's brain from the moment that he had received the news of his nephew's death, and had even taken definite and material shape with respect to his young neighbor, Herbert Stanhope. But at all events he had quite made up his mind that the proposals of John Denton should be rejected; for let the young engineer's future prosperity be what it might in his own line, it could never be of the sort to further the family popularity. Perhaps in one who had himself sacrificed so much to mere sentiment, this resolve may seem harsh and unnatural; but it is easier to give way to the softer emotions at eighteen than at sixty-eight, and easier at all times to disregard the sentiment of other people than one's own.

Thus it was that Ellen Blackburn found small pleasure in the sudden prosperity of her kindred, and sighed in her well-furnished chamber at the Manor for that little room in the cottage, through whose latticed window she had so often watched for her lover across the moor, and smoothed the tresses, innocent of flower or gem, to welcome him. Still, she was not unconscious of the delights of her new position, nor so plunged in grief (since she had hope to mitigate it), as not in some measure to appreciate them. The view from her present apartment (even without that beloved figure in the foreground) was not indeed to be compared with that to which she had so long been accustomed; but it had a beauty and home quiet of its own which pleased her much. Beyond the terrace and the carriage sweep, and separated from the latter only by a deep-sunk fence, lay a small but undulating and well-wooded park, with here and there a herd of deer. Upon one side was the village, with its ivied church-tower, from which the joy-bells were still pealing drearily; and on the other, field after field of richest pasture-land, with luxuriant hedges (so different from the stone walls about Slogan), that seemed to grow so near to one another in the blue distance that they inclosed no space at all.

Her bedroom opened upon a still more charming boudoir, from whose windows, if the prospect was more restricted, it was not less fair. Immediately beneath them lay the well-kept garden, a chess-board of flowering squares of various hue. A quaint old arbor, built of fir-cones, and ornamented with painted glass, opened on what had once been the bowling-green, but was now in course of alteration into a croquet-ground—a change which she rightly guessed had been made by young Richard for the sake of his betrothed. Beneath the shade of those spreading cedars, and on the levelled turf, he had doubtless stood with her, and shown how all things were to be, under her coming reign. They had paced together the winding walks of the shrubbery beyond, and climbed yonder little hill with its gay pavilion, from which all the

fields and farms which owned him for their master were to be seen. The bondoir itself had been recently fitted up, and for whom but for this poor girl, of whose very name she was ignorant, but whose fate—divorced forever from him she loved—touched her eyes with sympathetic tears. How it would vex this poor creature, when she came to hear it, that the new Squire had forbidden his people to breathe young Richard's name! That had been a bitter speech of her grandfather's, and painful to listen to; and although she did not doubt that his affection for her was genuine, though he showed it in such mistaken fashion, it was plain wealth had already made him hard and stern; and might not his nature keep that mould for the future? She could refuse to be false to her love, but she could never act in defiance of the old man's express commandment.

It did not need, then, the cold hand of death to keep asunder John Denton and herself. But against such thoughts as these she had a simple charm, that for the present at least proved efficacious. She drew from her bosom John's last letter, written on receipt of her harsh tidings, and which bade her be of good cheer, and to wait in hope. There was not a syllable of anger in it against her grandfather, who he frankly owned had at no time encouraged his addresses. It breathed nothing but love and trust in her; and as she read it softly to herself, the words seemed like a song, to which the summer breeze that came in at the open window, laden with evening odors, was the fit accompaniment; and her whole soul was lapped in comfort, and grew calm. Her toilet suffered from the use of this specific, for the second dinner-bell sounded before she had time to assume her evening attire. Her appearance, however, as has been shown, proved sufficiently attractive in the eyes of the only guest, Mr. Mowbray Moffat; while the lack of splendor in her attire was fully compensated for by that of Mrs. Blackburn, who, having had her pick of the family jewel-box, had not confined herself to mere satin and pearls.

After dinner, while the elder lady made an elaborate tour of the drawing-room, and approximately priced the furniture, the younger sat herself down at the piano and played a few sacred airs, such as she had been used to evoke from the harmonium in the little church, of which she had been organist, under Slogan; and presently, as we have seen, this attracted the notice of the gentlemen, and brought them in from the dining-room. Wrapt in the melody, she did not notice their arrival, but continued to play on, her pensive features with a chastened glow upon them, and her eyes full of devotional fire. Even Mr. Moffat, a man not given to enthusiasm of any sort, was struck with her rare and ethereal beauty, and stopped in the doorway like one spell-bound.

"She is a thorough Blackburn, is she not?" whispered Anthony admiringly; "as handsome as the dead lady we have just been speaking of,

and with a look besides such as the angels wear. I have sometimes feared that she would be taken from me because of that."

"Does she inherit any delicacy of constitution?" inquired the prosaic lawyer. "Both her parents died very young, sir, did they not?"

"Yes, but they were a hearty couple. The mother, a pretty girl enough, but not like this one, died in giving her birth. Her father, as strong a man as myself, came to an untimely end."

"Yes, poor lad. He fell down some precipice in Wales, as you wrote to tell me: that mountaineering" [he had been killed on Slogan by a powder-blast] "which is so much the fashion nowadays has been the death of many a fine young fellow. But though you have not mentioned him for years—your letters were so brief—this sweet young lady here is surely not your only hope—your eldest son is still alive, I trust?"

This was the question which the lawyer had had in his mind from the first, but had not hitherto ventured to put, since it was evident that his now client had reasons for his strange reticence on so important a matter. Mr. Moffat put it now with such directness, that an answer could scarcely be avoided, but kept his eyes averted from his host, and fixed on the young girl at the piano, otherwise he would have seen old Anthony's ruddy color change to deadliest white, as he replied stiffly: "My son William is alive, or I should not have failed to let you know, sir. At present, however, I do not expect him home. He is abroad.—There at last she sees us!—I am afraid we startled you a little, Nelly. But pray, play on; Mr. Moffat dotes on music as much as I do."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE SHADOW IN THE SUNSHINE.

THE evening passed away without any further reference on Mr. Moffat's part to the subject which had so embarrassed his host: but he had already sown the seed of disquiet in the latter's breast. Anthony Blackburn could not but have expected that his confidential man of business must needs, sooner or later, have put to him so pregnant a question—it was clearly necessary that he should convince himself of the existence or demise of his client's only son—and yet he had found himself quite unprepared to answer it. He was conscious that he had hesitated in his reply, and felt that he might very possibly have aroused suspicion; and all the time his granddaughter was singing, and while his fingers seemed to move in accord with her tunes, he was reproaching himself with his want of readiness, and devising plans for setting the lawyer's doubts at rest. He could never suffer him to leave the house with this idea of something amiss upon his mind, to grow and grow, until perhaps it took some monstrous shape, as

bad as the reality itself. Accordingly, when the lawyer rose to take his leave, his host insisted upon his having brandy and water and a cigar, in what was called "the Squire's Room," a cosy chamber decorated after the family fashion with portraits of horse and hound, the possession of which had at various periods dignified the Blackburn race. Stuffed fish of portentous size, that had fallen victims to brother Richard's rod and landing-net, adorned the walls; the bell-ropes were fox brushes earned by Ferdinand; and on the mantel-piece was a mighty drinking-horn with silver edge, the contents of which Charles had been wont to empty at a draught before being helped to bed. The window of this apartment was at the back of the house, and opened upon a portion of the stable-yard; and in times not very remote, the diversion of cock-fighting had been carried on outside, while the inmates sat at ease, as in an opera-box, and wagered, pipe in mouth, upon the result of the conflict. Perhaps, upon the whole, it was of all the rooms in the house the one most redolent of the family fragrance; and when the door opened to Anthony's touch, a crowd of memories seemed to come forth to greet him, which, although by no means hallowed, had a certain impressiveness; for all these jolly sportsmen, dicers, drinkers, that he had known or heard of had been his kith and kin, and were now dead.

"It was in this room, Moffat, that I tasted my first whiff of tobacco," quoth Anthony, gazing earnestly around. "My father filled the pipe, and laughed till he cried, when the fumes made me ill. It seems but yesterday! How well I remember that old pryt yonder of the prize-fight! One of the men is Mendoza; and that old fellow with the lady is Old Q. at ninety years of age with his nurse. Old Q. was Queensberry, you know."

"Yes, yes," said the lawyer; "the Duke, of course. He was quite childish for years before his death."

"Ah," said Anthony suddenly, "that reminds me, Moffat, it is a thing that may happen to either one of us in a year or two, for we are not young men; and I wish to provide at once against it. — Here, mix your liquor for yourself, and take a cigar, and let us have a quiet chat together about business. — I wish to make — to give you instructions about my will."

"Your will, sir? I hope it may be many years—" (The Squire motioned with his hand impatiently.) "But there, as you would say, it is well to provide against the worst, and while we are in health, to do those things, which, being undone, may make sickness an anxious time."

"My father, as I understood," said the old Squire thoughtfully, puffing at his cigar, "placed my name in his will without putting it into the entail at all."

"Just so, sir. He left, failing your brothers and their heirs, the whole estate to you absolutely and at your own disposal."

"No thanks to him, sir," exclaimed Antho-

ny hotly. "I've no more gratitude for what he did than he felt towards the fox whose brush gave him yonder bell-handle. Why should I?"

"Well, certainly your father little thought that you would ever be the Squire here, when he made that will, sir; and, by-the-by his instructions for it were given singularly enough in this very room. My uncle told me all about it, when he came home that day — and vexed enough he was that matters had so turned out, for, like myself, he had always wished you well."

"Never mind his wishes, Mr. Moffat; let me know what he said about the will."

"Nay, there was not much to tell, sir. I know, of course, how bitter your father was against you, and how resolved to cut you off. But still I thought there might be some remembrance — a legacy or something — and it gave me quite a shock sir, it did, upon my sacred word and honor, when my uncle Robert told me what had happened. Mr. Ferdinand, you see, was but a lad at the time; and your other brothers mere children: and it seemed so certain that if one died the others would live — and then their children — why, your chance seemed out of the question altogether. 'I wish,' said your father, 'to make an eldest son of Ferdinand, and to leave the Manor in entail to him and his heirs; and they failing, I would do the same with Charles, and then with Richard.' Well, you remember how bad your father was to cross: so my uncle said nothing about you at that moment, but entered into the affair of your younger brothers' portions, in case Ferdinand and his heirs succeeded; and then, when that was settled — they were to have the Mosedale property between them, which has now, by-the-by, become more valuable than all the rest — and yet no word was spoken about yourself, my uncle ventured to say: 'And what do you wish done about your son Anthony?'"

"Yes; now, what did he reply?" asked the Squire earnestly. "Tell me the truth, Moffat, though I know it will be a bitter morsel."

"He said that he wished nothing done, and that he had no son Anthony."

"He said that, did he?" observed the Squire between his teeth. "Well, I had no father, then. — Go on."

"Then my uncle Robert spoke of some money that happened to be lying in the banker's hands — a loose thousand or two; all together, perhaps fifteen hundred pounds — and mentioned that he had heard of you of late as being very ill off, and since this sum was not appropriated — But your father burst in with his 'No, sir, no;' and there was an end of that."

"But how, then, came my name to appear in the will at all?"

"It was your mother's doing, sir: she begged and prayed that it should not be left out altogether; and since it looked as though it did not matter a pin's point, your name was put in last, to comfort her. 'And if he gets it, wife,' said Squire Russell, with a wink at my uncle, 'he shall have the Manor for his own, to leave it to

whom he pleases;’ whereupon she thanked him with tears, thinking, poor soul, that he was really doing you a kindness. And indeed, as it has turned out, he was; for although, in any case, you must have succeeded to the estate, as your late nephew’s heir-at-law, you might not have found it solely at your own disposal.”

“Which it now is, of course?”

“Most certainly it is, sir; and a very fine property it has of late become. Your income, thanks to the growth of Mosedale, is at least thrice what your father’s was—and, if I may venture to advise, it is out of that portion of the estate that any provision you may please to make for Miss Ellen should come, leaving the Manor lands to descend as a matter of course.”

Anthony held up his finger. “I wish my granddaughter, Ellen, to inherit Blackburn Manor and all the lands about,” said he with grave distinctness. “She will be my sole heiress, Mr. Moffat.”

“But your son, sir?” ejaculated the lawyer with profound astonishment.

“I shall see that my son, William Blackburn, is provided for according to his deserts, out of the Mosedale lands. Your own suggestion, in fact, is to be adopted, with a change of names; and you will come to-morrow and lay the whole matter clearly before me; but in the mean time I wished you to labor under no misconception, not even for a single day, concerning my intentions for the future. Do you understand them?”

“Perfectly, sir.”

“Well, that is enough for to-night then; we will speak of details at a more reasonable time.—If you will really not take another glass, I will ring for your horse.”

The lawyer had not recovered from his surprise even when he found himself in the open air and on the back of his own sober gray. “Is there never again to be a Blackburn at the Manor-house?” muttered he. “Are Squire and son forever to quarrel? And yet these two can not have so serious a breach as I at first imagined, else the old man would not be so well intentioned towards him. But to have this young girl to be his heiress, who has herself so much sweetness and beauty, is to make her the best match in all the county!” And the lawyer, who although so keen at his trade, was a very old woman for matchmaking and gossip, began to reckon up in his mind all the local magnates who had sons to enter for so desirable a prize, and hugged himself with the possession of the great news that he should be first to spread.

Thus Anthony Blackburn had succeeded to his heart’s content in putting to rest his guest’s suspicions, and sent him away precisely in the frame of mind in which he would have had him to be. Yet the old man sat long alone after the lawyer had departed, with moody and dissatisfied face, and though he drank glass after glass of the strong liquor, it failed to cheer him. At last, with not an altogether steady step, he sought his bedchamber, and finding his wife seated at

an escritoire, inquired of her, in no distinct nor amiable accents, what was keeping her up so late.

“I was writing the letter, Anthony,” said she simply.

It may seem strange that an occupation of so ordinary a kind should have engaged a lady from ten o’clock until after midnight, but the fact was that epistolary composition was not an art in which Mrs. Blackburn was a proficient, and the sheet of paper before her had only just been folded, and was being placed in its envelope, when her husband appeared. He staggered across the room, and looked over her shoulder at the address, which, with her head aside, her lips projected, and her eyes in apparent astonishment at the success which crowned her efforts, she was in the act of completing. “You might have saved yourself this trouble,” said he doggedly: “that letter must not be sent.”

“Not be sent, Anthony!” ejaculated she with sudden pallor. “Why you promised me that so soon as we got here, I might write to tell him! It is what I have looked forward to above all else.”

“I can not help it, Mary,” answered the Squire, moved by his wife’s disappointed tone; “and I am truly sorry for your sake. But I have been thinking of the whole matter for these last two hours, and it will never do to let him know—that is, not yet. He would be coming down upon us here post-haste, and spoiling all at once.”

“Spoiling all?” repeated Mrs. Blackburn.

“You need not mock my words, woman, like an echo,” replied the Squire, endeavoring to lash himself into a passion, which his genuine affection for his wife rendered very difficult: “there can be no doubt of what I mean. Shall we not find it hard work enough to win our way here among our equals, without being hampered with such a clog as he?”

“A clog, Anthony, your own and only son!”

“Ah, would he were not: he is a taint in my blood, a disgrace to me, who begat him; to you, who bore him. I will not have him here to frighten folks with his black looks. He can not keep from mischief, nor in his cups from bragging of it. He will blurt out the whole story of his shame some day, and then what will become of Nelly?”

“She has a pretty face, and will have a fortune that fits in with it,” said Mrs. Blackburn coldly: “no hurt can happen to her.”

“What! do you think, then, that the young gentleman—or nobleman, as likely as not—whom she may chance to choose, would hold to his bargain, if this ruffian, her grandfather’s son, should once show himself in his true colors? And would that be no hurt to Nelly? If she comes to harm that way, as surely as the moon sits in the sky, yonder, William shall never see a penny of mine.”

“You would play the same part, then, Anthony, as your father played to you, and earn the hatred of your own flesh and blood, as he did.”

"No, not the same," said the old man excitedly, now taking vast strides across the room, the passion of his mind having apparently overcome all effects of the liquor he had so lately swallowed. "I call Heaven to witness, as I have often done, that my father had no honest ground of quarrel with me. I had not disgraced him and his forever; I had not committed a mean and hateful—"

"Hush, Anthony, hush!" exclaimed Mrs. Blackburn piteously. "For my sake, if not for his, do not proclaim his shame to all the house."

"There," answered the Squire triumphantly, "you yourself fear that it should be known here, and yet you would take no precaution to prevent its disclosure. You wish it to be told, I suppose, by his own sottish tongue, to be corroborated by his own brutal ways and hang-dog looks, as you well know it will be."

"But, Anthony, what would you have him do?"

"I would have him kept off from here as long as may be—for one clear year at least—for thirteen months—is it not thirteen?" And the Squire stopped in his walk, and cast a terrible glance at his wife, who turned her face from him as he did so.

"It is twelve months and fourteen days," replied she in low and trembling tones.

"At least, then," continued the squire, "let that much of time elapse before he shows his face here. There is surely reason enough for setting of that limit. When it is passed, you shall take your own way in the affair. Our Nelly will by that time—and I have set the matter in train already, if I am not mistaken—have made her position in the county assured by marriage; only, let not this precious son of ours come here and ruin all, before he is sent for, else, by Heaven, it will be the worse for him. So let the thing be settled, wife, as I have said, and do you tear up that letter."

But Mrs. Blackburn had already locked it safely in her escritoir, and secured the key.

"I will not send it, Anthony, since you forbid me," returned she quietly; "but I must keep the letter until the time comes at last for me to send it; for then, as he reads it, he will know how, when fortune began to smile on us, I welcomed it mainly for his sake, and guess at all I feel this wretched hour."

"He will know nothing—he will feeling nothing," answered the Squire sternly, "except so far as he is himself concerned. Do not flatter yourself that William Blackburn is in any way changed, or ever will be, from the heartless good-for-nothing we have always found him. At least, for my part, whatsoever disappointments may lie in store for me, and they may be many yet, I can experience none from him."

And the Squire moved slowly into his dressing-room, keeping his eyes fixed to the last upon his wife, as she sat with her face in her hands, and her gray hair falling over them, as the willow droops above a tombstone.

CHAPTER IX.

THE HORSE AND THE MARE.

It is ten months since the events related in our last chapter, and the morning sun of another autumn is lighting up a scene far different from the quiet landscape about Blackburn Manor. It shines upon our great sea-side haunt of fashion, fuller even than usual of gay company, because of the race-meeting at neighboring Goodwood. It is the Cup day, and therefore many of its stately mansions and all its hotels have been astir earlier than usual. Upon this day the tide of brilliant equipages on the west cliff will suffer perceptible decrease, and the broad walks will be traversed without jostling. For the present, however, all is haste and preparation. The *New Unlimited*, in particular, before which are in waiting a score of various vehicles, seems alive from its eighth floor to its basement. The porter opens its folding-doors to incomers and outgoers with the regularity of a swift automaton; the clerk in the glass box is questioned ten times per minute respecting the movements of this or that inmate of the gilded hive. The spacious hall is crowded by knots of men, who whisper to one another mysteriously, and jot down the result of their deliberation in little books. The broad staircases are trodden by ethereal creatures ascending and descending in gorgeous attire, but all bound, sooner or later, for the park and the course. In the balconies, too, are here and there to be seen a pair of eager but quiet talkers, very different from the tender couples who have been known to stand there by moonlight, and watch the waves kiss the shore, and sighing, reluctantly withdraw. These present pairs are all of the masculine gender, and their theme is a sordid one enough. If their thoughts are concerned with the other sex at all, it is with females of the equine race. Is the mare "fit?" Can the mare "stay?" are the questions that absorb them. Let us play the eavesdropper upon these two gentlemen-sportsmen who are looking forth from the first-floor circle upon the vast expanse of sea and sky, without the least consciousness of the presence of either. Folks do not come to Brighton for sublimity and the beauties of nature, and least of all in the Goodwood race week.

This pale-faced, delicate-featured young fellow, with the well-kept black mustache, we have seen before, and easily recognize, although, in place of the tourist suit in which we saw him last, he is dressed in the highest fashion, with a rose in his button-hole, and an opera-glass slung across his shoulder. It is Mr. Herbert Stanhope of Curlew Hall. The other, a stout, good-humored-looking gentleman, is his junior by a year or two, his elder in point of astuteness in the business in which they are both engaged, by many years; inside the cover of his race-glass is to be read, in great gold letters, his name and address: "Mr. Frank Dawlish, The Albany." But he is known by all the world—that is, his world—as Sporting Dawlish. We do not pay him an

extravagant compliment when we say that among "the gentlemen-sportsmen" who live, and move, and have their being upon British race-courses, there were very many worse than he.

"It is not the perfect certainty that all these fellows think, Stanhope," said he, jerking his thumb contemptuously towards the open window behind them, through which, in a large, finely-furnished room, two or three men could be seen still seated around the breakfast-table, although the special trains had already begun to run from the station, and all the hired vehicles in the street were tending thither, as though drawn by a magnet.

"There is nothing to beat her," replied Stanhope, positively, and without removing the cigar that was between his lips: "that is Dean's honest conviction. I had a long talk with him this very morning."

"In spite of Dean's honesty, however, if I were you, I should hedge."

"What bosh you talk, Dawlish," ejaculated the other impatiently. "How can I hedge, with such short odds against the horse? I just heard Wyndham taking two to one about him."

"I saw you did," said the other dryly. "If *Gazebo* wins, you will be hard hit, I fear, won't you?"

"Hard hit? I shall be ruined, Frank; that's all. But there is no chance of such a thing, I feel sure of that, whatever wins."

"You don't *look* sure, my dear fellow; and, forgive me, but it is you who are talking bosh now, not I."

"I betted against that horse," said Stanhope excitedly, "when he stood at twenty to one, which was his proper position, as you will own to me to-night, Dawlish; and I will bet against him now, though he rose to evens. I hate the beast."

"You should never hate a horse, my good fellow," returned the other coolly; "it is almost worse than having a particular fancy for one, as you have for this *Vignette*. Horses are like men and women: you should never let your judgment of them be blinded by your partiality or prejudice. You are saying to yourself: 'Here's a pretty 'mentor,' who is said to have lost a fortune in one race at Ascot!' Yet, surely an experience which has cost one so dear ought to be worth something, as indeed it is. I tell you this 'picking out an animal for one's self from the very first,' as some of those wise-acres in yonder room are so fond of talking about, is sheer madness, simple suicide. I believe in the mare myself, but I also believe in *Gazebo*, or rather I believe in neither of them. What do you stand to win by, besides the mare?"

"Every thing. Nothing but *Gazebo's* winning can hurt me. I would give a thousand pounds to know the beast was dead."

"Well, I am not so bloodthirsty," said Dawlish, laughing; "a little lameness would satisfy me; then, when he got well, I would back him for the next long race, for I do think he's a good 'stayer;' and if it happened to be wet to-day—

but there, there is no chance of that. It is the very weather for *Vignette*. Come, let us drink her health in a glass of Hock and Seltzer, and then be off." Whereupon the two friends stepped inside.

Have any of my readers ever had a large sum depending upon a horse-race? I mean a sum, whether large or not, which is of considerable importance to themselves. If so, they will easily understand that as Mr. Herbert Stanhope drives through the pleasant Park of Goodwood side by side with "Sporting Dawlish," he does not interest himself greatly in the scene nor in the company. A less occupied mind could not fail to mark the incongruity between those shady glades and sylvan solitudes and the noisy throng that hurries through them, in every species of conveyance, from the four-in-hand to the coster's cart, on horseback and on foot. Among these last, a tumultuous array of country-folks, and card-sharpers, orange-sellers, and acrobats, there is one class alone, the gipsies, who do not seem out of place, but even they have suspended their usual picturesque avocations, and taken to selling "lists of the running horses." Upon the whole, the spectacle suggests some pantomimic rehearsal, in which the beautiful scenery by Grieve or Telbin has been suffered to remain, while that indiscriminate mob who are so much in need of the policeman engross the stage. But for all that he sees, and almost for all that he hears, Mr. Herbert Stanhope might be in the Underground Railway. His stake in the coming "event" itself is so large that the anticipation of it may well monopolize his mind; and yet he does not think of the race at all, but only of its possible consequences. In the case of one result, which is likely enough to happen (Mr. Dean says it's "a positive certainty"), he will recoup himself for the losses of years, and be re-established at Curlew Hall in at least as good pecuniary circumstances as those in which he was left at his father's death; and in the case of any other result save that, and *one other*, he will be no worse off than at present, and indeed (only it is not worth his while to think of that) the better by some hundreds. But then it is also possible that this *one other* thing may happen, in which case Herbert Stanhope will be ruined. "If there is a worse thing than 'a fancy' in horse-flesh," says that experienced sage Mr. Dawlish, "it is a prejudice;" and his friend has entertained a prejudice from the first against *Gazebo*. It is well to lay odds rather than to take them, but then you must lay them *round*. It is bad to stand to win upon one horse only, but it is much worse to have staked your all against another. Mr. Herbert Stanhope has not only "put the pot" on the black and yellow, which are the colors of *Vignette*, but he is "full," and a great deal too "full," against the "scarlet" worn by the rival favorite. Of course, there is nothing in his outward demeanor to show it: to look at, Mr. Stanhope is merely a calm, unexceptionably attired young gentleman, whose mission, like that of the rest of the aris-

toocracy present, is to maintain the poor fellows who form the betting-ring; but his heart throbs under the rose in his button-hole, and an unpleasant shiver pervades him when the strident voices round about him roar out: "I'll bet against *Vig-net*," and still worse when he overhears a colloquy (and there are many such) between "Fly and Spider," when the latter answers: "I can only give you six to four, sir, against *Gazebo*." He is quite resolved not to hedge a shilling at such a price as that.

What a scene it is!—yonder noble sweep of level turf embosomed in the wooded hills, with the sunlit sky above all, and these discordant human figures, the members of the betting-ring, in the foreground, as jealously railed in as though they were really the wild beasts that faintly typify them. The din, the roar, and, may we be permitted to add, the smell of them, are to be found on a smaller scale in Wombwell's Menagerie; the brazen fraud, the rapacious, merciless greed, are wholly without parallel elsewhere. Look at these men; they have mostly some inscription upon the money-bags or pouches which they bear round their necks—*Jones of London*, *Smith of Birmingham*, or what not—whereby those who have dealings with them may recognize them at a glance; but none of them are more legible than the word *Rogue*, which their trade has stamped upon their features. Some of them have planted in the earth gigantic umbrellas (similarly emblazoned with their names and addresses), and under these they carry on what is literally enough a roaring trade. Others stand with their backs against the railings, protesting, and methinks they do protest too much, that there they will be found after each race, prepared to settle with all and sundry who shall in the mean time have favored them with their patronage—entrusted them with the money which not many of their patrons will see again. These Spiders are all wonderfully alike in visage, though they may differ in form—some being bloated and unwieldy, as though they were almost gorged; others thin and hungry; but the Flies on whom they feed are more diverse. There are several quiet, sober-looking, respectable brown flies (clerks who have borrowed their employers' money perhaps to make a safe investment on this occasion); very many, too, of a hybrid sort, that would astonish a naturalist, being half-fly half-spider, and in a transition state from the former to the latter; and a considerable sprinkling of quite bright and brilliant flies, who are, however, come in search of the same garbage as the rest, just as one marks with wonder what gay and golden insects will circle about the offal in the streets. These last are the noblemen and gentlemen who would not soil their hands with vulgar Trade upon any account, but who think it no shame to adopt as their profession the Turf; and, curiously enough, notwithstanding their gilded wings, it is whispered that even some of these are on the verge of the transition state which has been hinted at above.

Strangest of all, immediately above this crowd, from which arises an indescribable clamor (when the coming-off of some minor race does not subdue it to that sort of insect hum which is so often heard in the summer-time above some mass of material corruption)—strangest of all, we say, in box and balcony of the Grand Stand that immediately overhangs this crowd sit the fairest and proudest of England's daughters, and apparently not at all discomposed by the scene in question. Many a smile and nod greet Mr. Herbert Stanhope as he looks upward into that bright array, and time had been when more than one neatly gloved hand would have pointed out a vacant seat for him beside its owner; but the great ladies who patronize Goodwood are very wary, and soon get to know when a *parti* has ceased to be eligible to their sweet Constances and Arabellas, and the losses of the master of Curlew Hall were no secret to any of them. It is probable, however, that in his present mood Stanhope would not have accepted an invitation from any quarter; his mind was too anxious to stoop to frivolities; he found it hard enough to throw into his expressive features the air of delighted recognition they were expected to wear, without being compelled to exchange polished commonplaces and wager gloves with ladies of fashion. True, a horse-race is itself a frivolity in the eyes of many, but the one which was now approaching was to Stanhope at least a matter of the most paramount importance, and monopolized his attention wholly.

The bell was rung for saddling, and his friend and himself went to see the horses, or rather to see the mare and horse (for he had no eyes for the others), stripped and shining like mirrors, each with arching neck and pricking ear, as though conscious of the hopes and fears that they excited in so many human breasts; for verily the Goodwood Cup day is one cut out of the calendar of the Houshynhym, wherein the Horse is the master of the Man. When this was over, Stanhope and Dawlish made their way to their own places in the Grand Stand, in a box of about the size of a bathing-machine, which they had secured months beforehand at a great price.

The jugglers, the dancers, the Ethiopian singers, the sellers of gingerbread nuts and of effervescing drinks, had been driven from the course by the impartial hands of the police, and even the few gentlemen with Stand tickets in their hats who still remained were condescending to leave it. The broad green road, hitherto concealed by countless thousands, lay bare at last as though some Red Sea miracle had been wrought for the horses' sake who were about to run between those pent-up waves of men. One by one, they take their preparatory canter down the course; each as they go by evoking his share of applause, mingled perhaps with some would-be knowing criticism from the spectators; but the admiration rises to a sullen roar as, side by side, the horse and mare happen to

go by together stride by stride. They are both bays, but the black and yellow contrasts sufficiently with the scarlet to keep them distinct to all eyes (had there been need) to the very horizon's verge. Gay and haggard, Stanhope raises his glass, and scans them narrowly. His hand is a little tremulous, but his face is perfectly calm as he remarks: "The horse gallops well." Sporting Dawlish gives a nod and a look which are quite the perfection of sign-language—"I believe you; he gallops a deal too well, as I always told you—" but he does not reply in words. The vast sea of humanity has ceased to roar; only one wave of speech breaks upon the ear, where a cardseller, who unites with his calling that of sweeping unconsidered trifles from people's carriages while their attention is absorbed, and who has been detected, inveighs against an eaves-dropping police.

The long array of shining steeds, with their still more conspicuous riders, is drawn up in two lines, like a rainbow and its reflex; the red flag falls; an inarticulate thunder of voices announces the fact that "they are off." The mare is leading as they pass the Stand, but will she lead when they come round again? From his position, Stanhope is able with the aid of his glasses to command the entire course—to mark every incident of the struggle from first to last. But he makes no comment. Sporting Dawlish is not so reticent. He has no such stake in the event as his friend has, although he has other reasons besides friendship for wishing to see *Vignette* win. He has many strings to his bow, and one of them has snapped. "There's one out of it already," says he composedly; "that *Campfire* has pulled up short. I always thought he would never stay such a course as this, though I did put a tenner on him. They're beginning to scatter, eh? That wretched weed *Julep* seems to have a nice chance, don't he?—last of all. By Jove, how the horse is coming on!"

The horse—that is, the horse—was indeed coming on; even at that great distance, and while the goal was yet far off, experienced eyes, such as were now watching so eagerly, could detect certain portentous signs in the equine struggle. *Vignette*, who had taken up the running too early, as it was afterwards said (for no race-horse is ever beaten, in the opinion of his backers, but through some extraneous cause), was indeed already "in difficulties." Herbert Stanhope was among the first to see this, and with the air of a general who sees the battle has gone against him, he shut up his glass with a laconic "The mare is beaten," long before the jubilant crowd began to shout: "*Gazebo* wins!"

CHAPTER X.

MR. DAWLISH'S "TIP."

At the moment that the race was won, and almost before the numbers displayed upon the official board quenched the last hopes of the los-

ers, a tumult arose in the ring beneath the Stand. One of the spiders, who happened to have laid too heavily against *Gazebo*, was detected in attempting to make his escape, and so avoid settling with his creditors. He had his money-bag full of the coin intrusted to him by the backers of the winner, and such a proceeding as he had in contemplation was undoubtedly far worse than pickpocketing, inasmuch as it was robbery aggravated by breach of confidence. But if it had been murder in its most aggravated form, it could not (or certainly would not) have aroused so furious a storm. It was not only those whom he had plundered who were now setting on him like terriers on some hated vermin, but his own brethren of the pouches, whose honor, forsooth, was the breath of their nostrils, and whose credit—on which all their hopes were built—was imperilled by his felonious intent. "A welsher! a welsher!" resounded from every side; and in less time than it takes to tell it, he became the centre of a crowd, in whose looks was no shadow of mercy, and whose hands threatened to tear him limb from limb. "If we can not get our money," cried one, "we will have his skin;" and in one minute the howling mob had so far acted upon this suggestion as to denude the delinquent of his clothes. In half a shirt and some remnants of a pair of trowsers, the miserable wretch was tossed, and torn, and worried immediately beneath the eyes of that gracious female aristocracy in whom Mr. Thomas Carlyle sees the last hope of England's stability. It was only the unanimity of his assailants, who by their kicks and blows kept him up on all sides, that saved him from death, for if he had once gone down, he would have been trampled into a living grave. Naked, and bleeding, and bruised, and with his thievish face distorted by pain and terror, he offered indeed a frightful spectacle, and Stanhope shuddered as he looked down upon it. "By Heaven! they'll kill the man," cried he. "Not they," answered Sporting Dawlish with his pleasant smile; "Welshers are never killed. I wish I had got his bag, for it had a pony of mine in it—the scoundrel!—what one may call a Welsh pony. See how the cunning villain is working himself towards the gate."

And indeed, even while he spoke, the miserable creature, as though by special assistance of his patron the devil, did manage to get himself hustled towards the turnstile, whence, by the simultaneous impulse of a dozen feet, he was shot out into the course, which absorbed him.

"There's a fine moral lesson," observed Dawlish. "Not one of those gentry down yonder but will be careful to settle their debts of honor for the rest of the day. Now is the time to invest a little money, if one had it, upon the next race, with the certainty of getting paid if one won. It's a fine thing is Lynch Law, where there's no other."

Stanhope did not speak; he was thinking that the difference between his own case and that of the welsher was but small; for, by *Gazebo's* vic-

tory, he had lost not only more than he could afford, but even more than he could pay.

"I am afraid you have been hard hit, old fellow," said his companion kindly; "but better luck next time."

"There is no next time for me, man," returned the other gloomily."

"Pooh, pooh; so thought I at one time, when I dropped twenty thousand at Ascot; and yet here I am, you see, both merry and wise."

"Yes, but you had another fortune left you, in place of the one you lost; and there is nobody to leave me a penny. I told you this morning, that, if that cursed horse won, I should be a ruined man, and now it has come to pass, Frank."

"Well, you can't say I didn't warn you, old fellow. I always had my own opinion about 'honest Dean' and his prophecies. But there; that is cold comfort. Now, let me say this, Stanhope?—and he placed his hand upon the other's shoulder; "I am not so well off as I have been, but I have something yet with which to serve a friend. I will help you to settle this matter, and then in three months' time—or even in six—you can pay me back, you know."

"Thank you, Dawlish—thank you kindly. You are a better fellow than I took you for. But, on the other hand, I am worse than you imagined; I can't pay my debts."

"You mean not now; well, that can't be helped. They must wait a bit—that's all; or rather, I'll wait, and do you pay the rest."

"I can not pay you nor them," returned Stanhope sullenly; "neither now or ever."

"Not pay!" ejaculated Dawlish aghast, and mechanically returning to his pocket the check-book in which he had been calculating his balance at his banker's. "Not pay, Stanhope? But that's all confounded nonsense; you know one must pay;" and his gaze wandered or seemed to his friend to wander, to a certain spot, where, on the railings of the ring, fluttered, in sign of avenged justice, or as a flag of triumph, three-fourths of the welsher's shirt. "Why, good heavens," continued the astonished turfite, this outrage upon his narrow but strong instincts of morality quite elevating his style, "I can scarcely believe my ears, or at least that they are listening to Herbert Stanhope. Sooner than be a de—"

He hesitated; but the other supplied the half-finished word: "Sooner than be a defaulter, you were about to say," observed he quietly, "you would do what?"

"Well, I would sell my very clothes off my back;" and again that fluttering emblem of peace, and confidence restored, seemed to catch the speaker's eye. "I would sell my place, Curlew Hall, if I were you, every stick and stone of it, rather than not pay."

"The Hall is sold; or at least mortgaged to nearly its full value," replied Stanhope hoarsely. "As sure as the sun shines, I have almost a mind to go down among those devils, and let them tear me to pieces, as they did the—the

other fellow. I could bear the pain, if it wasn't for the shame of it.—By-the-by, I owe you a couple of ponies, old fellow; and here they are. I shouldn't like you to say, if any thing were to happen to me, the same word you said of me just now; because we were at Eton together, and— Oh, Frank, old fellow, what an infernal fool I've been!"

The babel of the racecourse had once more broken forth. Beneath them, the brazen voices were shouting their offers against this and that in the race to come; the drums of the showmen were beating; the venders of cards were plying their trade in tones as harsh as the corn-crake's; and the busy throng was all astrig again about its business or its pleasure. But, for the moment Herbert Stanhope's mind was far away in the "playing-fields" of Eton. The tall elms swayed above him, as he lay on the grassy bank of the loved river, with his friend beside him, both boys without a care. It was not ten years ago: but what a gulf had he dug with his own hands between those days and this! What chances—nay, what certainties—had he flung away, until there was no chance left!

It is not to be imagined that Sporting Dawlish (who, after a short but severe struggle with himself, had pocketed the pair of "ponies," otherwise fifty pounds) was overcome by boyish reminiscences to the same extent as his friend; but he was not untouched by Stanhope's involuntary reference to that common portion of their past, and while he leaned over the balcony, and seemed to scan the surging crowd, he was stroking thoughtfully his still smooth and dimpled chin, and thinking within himself what help he could be to his old schoolfellow.

"There was Sweden—he had heard men say—where a fellow might get out of the way for any amount of years, and live pretty jollily too, except that there was no Epom nor Ascot. And if Stanhope went there, and waited, why, in time that Redmoor property, so near to Mosedale would be worth any money. The lawyer fellow, Moffat,—and a deuced sharp old file too—had told him so himself, when he was staying at his friend's house that very summer;" and then, all of a sudden another plan, begotten of that reminiscence, sprang, Minerva-like, full-grown from Sporting Dawlish's quick brain. He turned.

Stanhope had risen, and was evidently about to leave the box. "Old fellow," said he, with an attempt at a smile, "I have made out matters to be rather worse than they really are; I dare say I shall pull round after all. I have plenty of money at the banker's to settle next week with all those at least who are likely to make themselves unpleasant. Those who know me—I am not hinting at that fifty pounds, Frank—that was a mere bagatelle, unfortunately, and would do me no good, and you were quite right to take it—those who know me, I say, will wait a little; and you may tell them yonder, if they ask, that they shall hear of me in a day or two." And Stanhope nodded as

though he would be back again shortly, and laid his fingers on the handle of the door.

"I say, Herby, you mustn't do *that*, you know," said Dawlish, stepping hastily up to him—"you mustn't, indeed."

"Mustn't do what, my good fellow?"

"Why, fight a duel with yourself, like Hervey did last year, just because he had made a bad book on the Leger. Your brains are far too good to be scattered that way; and besides, though I'm no parson, it ain't right, and it won't stop people's mouths neither; they will 'say things' just the same, whether you are dead or alive, you know!"

"I never dreamed of any such folly as you hint at, Dawlish.—Come, let me go."

"Not yet; I want to say a word or two to you first. I have thought of a way by which you can get out of this hole altogether; not a way that you would have chosen for yourself, perhaps, but, at all events, a far better one than blowing your brains out: one, too, that would seem pleasant to lots of men, let me tell you—very."

"You make one quite pleased at being ruined, Dawlish," said Stanhope bitterly. "This seems so good a plan, that I wonder you have never taken advantage of it yourself."

"I would if I could," returned the other naively; "that is," he added hastily, "I only did not try because I saw the thing was out of my reach.—Now, tell me how much money do you stand to lose by this last race?"

"Why, to make a clean breast of it, my dear fellow, I have made a pretty mess of it. I have lost nearly eighteen thousand pounds."

"The devil you have! you must have 'plunged' indeed.—Well, I have hit upon a scheme whereby you may pay your debts, and still put two-and-twenty thousand pounds in your pocket."

"My handwriting is very peculiar," said Stanhope gravely, "and like no other man's that I am acquainted with; for I suppose you are suggesting a forgery."

"Nay, my good fellow; I am perfectly serious. The advice I give you is, to marry an heiress."

"Excellent!" said Stanhope grimly. "I saw Lady Anne Golconda in the Duke's box, just before the race. They say she will have half a million. Her mother was so good as to nod to me just now. I'll step round and arrange the matter."

"I am not speaking of any impossibility," continued Dawlish. "Just sit down, take a cigar, and be reasonable. I know of a girl both younger and prettier than the Golconda filly; a perfect lady (whatever her mamma may have been); and, what is more to the point, one who will have forty thousand pounds *down—down*, sir, on the day of her wedding! You must marry Nelly Blackburn, of Redcombe Manor."

Stanhope took from his case an immense cigar, and lit it with great care and deliberation.

"The idea is first-rate, old fellow," replied

he quietly, "but perfectly impracticable, as nobody should know better than yourself."

The countenance of Mr. Frank Dawlish, always of a fine fresh color, began to glow like a peony. "I! How so? What the deuce do you mean?"

"I thought there had been a trial-race between you, that's all," said Stanhope laughing; "and my impression was (to repeat your own metaphor) that you had found the Blackburn filly so unapproachable that to enter for the matrimonial stakes with her was out of the question."

"Upon my honor, Stanhope, I never proposed to the girl."

"I know you didn't; but still there was a trial-race; it was on the terrace after dinner, the night we dined there last, and you left me, if you remember, rather suddenly—'particular business' at Tattersall's, you told me—the next day."

"Well, perhaps there was," said Dawlish ruefully. "I confess I was a little spoony for a week or two; but we are talking of your affairs, and not of mine. I could not have been very deeply smitten, or I should not now be offering the young woman to your consideration. There are reasons to my disadvantage, which would not tell against you. I am not a swell like Herbert Stanhope. Nobody knows who my grandfather was, and indeed I don't know myself. My people made their money by a patent medicine; I am quite aware that I am called Pill Dawlish. It is only because I have a few thousands to lose to them, that I am tolerated by these fine gentlemen here. (I don't say by *you*, mind; you are not a born idiot, though you do happen to be well-born.) Well, putting myself aside, then, in this matter—though I do not choose to be put aside by others, and there's not one of these insolent scoundrels who have shown their hands to me so plainly, but shall lose when we come to play together—"

"My dear Frank, you astonish me!" interrupted Stanhope; "I did not know you were capable of a revengeful feeling, and I do assure you, you have greatly exaggerated it—"

"Never mind me, Stanhope," replied the other imperiously, "even though passion were to send me into a fit. The Dawlish pill is good for fits. I say this girl, Miss Ellen Blackburn (whom I very much esteem, let me tell you, and entertain no sort of grudge against), will not have the same objection to you as to me. That respectable savage, her male parent, is resolved to marry her to a noble swell—and you were a noble swell until within the last three-quarters of an hour. Up in Derbyshire, folks will not hear of the change in your circumstances for months."

"What you recommend is not running very straight, eh, Frank? or, at all events, not riding in one's own colors."

Sporting Dawlish shrugged his ample shoulders, thereby obliterating altogether his inch of neck. "Not to pay one's debts of honor is not quite playing on the square, Stanhope, if you

come to that," said he coolly. "If I thought you would ill-treat the girl, I swear I would not recommend her to you. But she will fare better with you than with almost any of these 'landed' gentry, as they call themselves, whom you and I know. (Landed, begad, I know they landed me when I was but two-and-twenty!) Yes, I own I should be disgusted to see her fall to one of them; but it is you I am thinking of mainly, old fellow; it is indeed. I know you are as proud as the devil; but you have so placed yourself, that some sort of humiliation must be endured. I dare say it will be disagreeable to you to have such a mother-in-law as Mrs. Blackburn (I shall never forget her drinking the water out of her finger-glass after dinner—never), but then you will not have to marry her. Now, Miss Ellen—"

"My good fellow, you waste your breath!" exclaimed Stanhope suddenly. "I agree with all you are about to say of that charming girl; but the fact that the Blackburn filly has an engagement of her own, which her trainer knows nothing about. Ellen Blackburn is betrothed; for she gave that as a reason for rejecting me, when I proposed to her myself."

Mr. Frank Dawlish whistled long and loud, like a locomotive before entering a tunnel. "Well, you must cut him out, that's all—I mean the other man, whoever he is."

"No, Frank; that is impossible. I am not in a position to stick at trifles; but when a girl has once declined to listen to me—"

There was a knock at the door, and a stout middle-aged gentleman of an astute countenance made his way into the small box, which was only intended to accommodate two persons.

"Hallo, Stanhope!" said he sharply, "you are the very man I wanted; and seeing Dawlish from below, I thought he could tell me where to find you. I wish to speak three words with you about business."

"You must go out first, Sir Arthur, if you wish to be alone, for I am hanged if I can pass you," said Dawlish laughing.

"Don't go, Frank," said Stanhope quietly. "I have no secrets from my friend here, so you can say whatever you please, Sir Arthur."

"Well, it's a very simple matter," said the new-comer, with an affectation of carelessness; "but the fact is this, I have been rather hard hit to-day. I have won of you, it is true, but I have lost more to others; and some of them don't know me so well as you do, and want their money at once. It's a queer thing to offer, but since it will put a few fivers in your pocket, and because you and I are old friends, I have just come to say this. Instead of your paying me that five hundred pounds on settling-day, if you choose to make it four hundred and seventy-five pounds *at once*, I'll take it."

"If you are in want of the money, Sir Arthur," said Stanhope, taking out his well-furnished pocket-book, "you are very welcome to what is your due, without any usurious discount. I had no idea your credit was so low with the fra-

ternity down yonder to which you belong." Every word was an icicle, and the air with which they were delivered was cutting as a north-east wind. "I hope you find the notes correct; perhaps you had better reckon them again."

"No, no: quite right, quite right," stammered the recipient, confused, if not abashed. "I only hope I have not inconvenienced you."

"Not by taking the money," said Stanhope, "at all; but you inconvenience us very much by remaining in the box."

"Just so, just so; two is company, and three is none, eh? Good-bye, then, and better luck to you next time." And the two friends were once more left alone.

"This beats every thing!" ejaculated Stanhope, his smothered fury at last exploding. "Why, I myself gave that infernal scoundrel 'time' only last Derby. To dun me like this, before even the money was due—why, what in the devil's name does it all mean?"

"It means simply this, my dear fellow, that you have already begun to be 'blown upon,' and that Sir Arthur guesses what has really happened. He believed you would bolt before settling-day, and that so firmly, that he was content to take twenty five pounds off his little bill, if he could but get it paid at once."

"No other man in England who calls himself a gentleman would have ventured on such a step," cried Stanhope. "What a shameless scoundrel!"

"Chut!" answered Dawlish contemptuously: "we are all alike on the turf, as we are under it. It is only that Sir Arthur wears triple brass upon his forehead, as that fellow we read of at Eton did about his heart, who first went to sea in a cock-boat; and, at all events, Sir Arthur is a magnificent liar. I saw his book upon the Cup, and so far from losing, he stood to win five thousand pounds on *Gazeebo* at least, besides your own little contribution. His manner may be grosser, but his method is only what is to be expected from all of them—even the best of these fellows won't wait for their money forever. Yours is not a case where one can afford to be squeamish about any body's feelings. I tell you, you must marry Ellen Blackburn, and cut the other fellow out."

"You talk of this cutting-out expedition," observed Stanhope grimly, "as though it were a cruise round the Isle of Wight."

"And so it is. Nothing is easier for a man like you, of good birth, of good looks, and I will add, of good brains—except when you take a prejudice against a horse: you have got both the girl's parents on your side."

"I think they did want me to marry her," muttered Stanhope thoughtfully.

"Want you!—they were pushing her down your throat, as a conjurer forces a card upon his audience. You should always endeavor to make a young woman obedient to her parents. I dare say she has formed some objectionable attachment. Why, it's your duty, sir."

"Is it?" said Stanhope absently.

"Of course it is. And then think of her forty thousand pounds *down!* Two-and-twenty thousand to live upon, after having satisfied these cormorants. Then, as for her not having been reared so delicately (although she is as true a gentlewoman as any in his Grace's box there), that is all the better. She will never miss the money; and having been brought up in habits of economy, will make what is left go farther. There: I think I have placed the whole matter now in its proper light. Is it possible, my dear fellow, that you fail to see it?"

"I see my necessity," answered Stanhope sighing; "but in case I don't win the girl after all?"

"You can't fail to do it," answered Dawlish energetically; "I'll bet ten to one on you. In the mean time, pay those you must, and let the others wait for their money. If you are very hard pressed, you may refer them to me. I am not a sentimental beggar, you know, *now*; that Ascot business took the softness out of my heart as well as my head; but for the sake of old times, Herby, you may, if the worst comes to the worst, depend upon me for four thousand.—No thanks, old fellow; but if you wish to oblige me, you will be at Curlew Hall by to-morrow night."

CHAPTER XI.

INSULA IN INSULA.

WITHIN ten hours' sail by steamer from Southampton, lies one of the most charming islands in the world. Though it acknowledges English rule, it is known, except through the geography books, but to few Englishmen; and it is so small, that one can scarcely see it upon the map. So small, and yet so grand. Huge cliffs still form its walls, albeit they are undermined and tunnelled everywhere, for the very entrails of the little isle are devoured by the raging seas. Six days out of seven (or so) it is set in a caldron of boiling waves; no boat can reach it, no boat can leave it. But on the seventh, as on some ocean Sabbath, it reposes calmly on a far-stretching deep of Mediterranean hue. In summer-time (as it now happens to be, there is sometimes "a week of Sundays.") But even in summer, and when the sea—which on the most windless day never ceases to hiss and foam immediately about it—is comparatively calm, no stranger may land on this enchanted isle. It has indeed one tiny harbor, but you might sail round and round, and never hit upon it; and when you found it, you would be no better off, were it not for the skill of man, that has worked a passage through the semicircle of solid rock into the heart of the island.

Across the harbor is built a break-water, very small but very strong, which leaves a narrow passage for such small craft as may venture to enter in. Even this snug haven is no shelter from the white malice of the ocean in its winter wrath; for a sailing-packet that had taken refuge there was once carried right over

the sea-wall, forty feet in height, and then cast back again in the same perilous fashion, as it were in majestic disdain. It is the isle itself, and not mere ships (of which the sea has a plenty in those parts), that the waves are wild for; and they will have it some day, as they swore to do thousands of years ago. It is said, I know not with what truth, that at one time this dot, this atom of land, was the extremity of a promontory from yonder foreign coast a score of miles away, and that the winds and storms have helped these foam-tipped thunderers to all the rest except this fragment, around which they leap and rage, and beneath which they roar and grumble, and above which (and right across it) they spout their sheeted spray.

It is no wonder they covet it; for the aforesaid tunnel from the harbor leads directly into Eden. From a scene of fury and foam, you step at once into quiet fairyland—a region of dell, and pasture, and shrubbery, and where, if the trees are small and scanty, the fuchsias are many, and, in bulk and luxuriance, trees. Nature made a garden here, with the original intention, as it would seem, of admitting not even an Adam and an Eve. But human beings got into it somehow, even before the tunnel era. There have been people on the little isle for many an age. The Romans "dropped their money" upon it in the same reckless way that distinguished them elsewhere, so I suppose *they* must have got there. It is difficult even for modern folks to spend money in the island in any other way. There are no diseases, and therefore no doctors' bills (or perhaps *vice versa*). Old age and drowning are the only complaints to which the inhabitants are heirs. There has never been a murder ~~nor~~ suicide in all that "right little tight little island." The uplands, bright with flowering shrubs, are swept by life-giving breezes; the wood dells (for they are too small to be called dales) have no damp save the spray of the sea. Food is cheap, and there is no need for fashionable attire; hence it happens, though the people are poor, they have enough, and are contented—that is, the aboriginal inhabitants—but then there are (sometimes) others whose company might be spared. It is whispered that now and then this Elysium is visited by certain gentry, who are not so much in search of the sublimities of nature, as of a spot which is (in a general way) out of the jurisdiction of the police.

The government of the place is paternal; the seigneur who rules it is literally a feudal lord; and in case of any crime being committed by a vassal, such as over-populating the place, he can "deport" the offender. It is even asserted that, if there be reason to suspect that such a misdemeanor may ensue, he has power to forbid the banns of a young couple; so that if they are bent on matrimony, they must emigrate elsewhere, where there is "room and verge enough" to bring up a family. The accommodation is of course limited; and if once

the population should outgrow their means of subsistence, what is to become of them all when the winds and waves forbid the arrival of provisions? There is a terrific example before these good folks in the rabbits which throng their little territory. No other crime that ever I heard of has been committed in this marine Eden. There are no rogues. Your portman-teau is left on the beach, without the least fear of its being appropriated as flotsam or jetsam. There is not even a public-house to get drunk in, so that all the vices have, as it were, to be imported; and it is not to be denied that in this great commercial era this has been done. With sherry at a shilling a bottle, and French brandy at two, the temptation is considerable, and especially to those individuals at whose existence I have hinted, who occasionally resort to the place for privacy to escape the glare of Policeman X.'s bull's eye. These drink to drown Care; and if they fail, it must be because he can swim, for they certainly take enough to drown him though he were cubits high.

The excellent *curé* of the place has less influence over these *mauvais sujets* than he might (perhaps) otherwise have, from the fact that he only speaks Norman-French (which is the tongue of the isle), and they for the most part only Cockney English. It may be asked by the sentimental: But does not the influence of the Beautiful and the Grand (and a number of other adjectives with capital letters) affect these scoundrels for good? Well-meaning but speckled* Enthusiastic—no. The Italian brigand is none the better for the mountains that surround his home, or the flawless firmament that stretches over it; and marine scenery is equally inefficacious in similar cases.

When I said there was no public-house in the island, I should have added that there are, nevertheless, establishments for the accommodation of the stranger who procures from a neighboring and larger isle his own spirituous liquors, or is content to do without them. Here is one of them; a small white farm-house (only without a farm), of two stories high, and with eight good-sized windows, that open on a natural lawn; there is no ordered garden, but the hedge that hems the little domain is of wild fuchsia; and there is a shrubbery, through which a tinkling stream runs, whose music is suddenly cut off by the sandy cliff, down which it softly falls some sixty feet into an enchanted bay—softly, so as not, in this calmest of August mornings, to disturb Thetis, who is basking on the shore, or, haply, Aphrodite, fresh and pink from the foam of the almost noiseless wave. The long blue coast, so clearly cut against the sky to eastward, is farther than it looks, so that she need not fear human eyes, even though aided by a Dolland's glasses; nor would mortal dare to peep at her over these dangerous overhanging cliffs, rich with grass and lichen, and with the

heather on their topmost summits purpling in the sun.

But, alas! this was in the Golden Age, where to the first sight of this bay transported me, and to which the recollection has carried me again. There are no goddesses now, nor even nymphs; which is quite as well under the circumstances, for there is a gentleman here, of middle age and objectionable appearance, who has evidently been bathing. If cleanliness is next to godliness, there is nevertheless, in some cases, a considerable interval; I am even inclined to believe that the proverb has done some harm, in persuading folks who patronize early "dips" that they need not also be religious. The subject of our present observation—Mr. William Roberts—for instance, has undoubtedly bathed, but I should question his having said his prayers. He is lying half-dressed upon the sand, with a short black pipe in his mouth, and an expression of countenance the reverse of devotional. "A month more," he soliloquizes, looking spitefully round upon the sapphire sea, and the cliffs beginning to glow in the growing sun-rays—"a month more in this confounded hole." From this remark, it may be gathered that the speaker was neither a painter nor a poet, which so far narrows the field of inquiry; but it is still difficult to guess to what calling he belongs. Mere appearance is not always to be trusted in such a matter, but he does not *look* like a clergyman; and, moreover, his attire—so far as it has at present advanced, which includes a red shirt and a pair of blue trousers—is scarcely clerical. Even if a white tie should lie among that heap of clothes which forms his pillow, it would not redeem him to that extent. Viewed from a distance, he really forms a charming bit of color—quite carries off the landscape, as the artists say; but, as you get nearer, even the landscape, beautiful as it is, fails to carry him off. Cruel eyes, which shoot sidelong when he is addressed; a low retreating brow; and thin white lips, foully mar a face which would otherwise be handsome, and make him, as it were, a blot upon that fair scene. What is he, and what does he there, insulting bountiful Nature with his ungrateful looks and his foul words? He is not drinking her health—this Trinculo of a fairer isle than Prospero's—I'll warrant, though again and again he puts yonder brandy-flask to his lips. The fact is, that Mr. William Roberts, although a powerfully built fellow enough, feels, notwithstanding his dip, a little shaky of a morning without this stimulus, under which it is satisfactory to note that he revives. He rises, yawns, and stretches himself, and still half-clothed, saunters down to the very margin of the sea. It is at the lowest of a low spring-tide, and much that the sea at most times hides beneath her dainty fringes is now visible: smooth breadths of silver sand, set with many a sparkling shell; and here a splendid star-fish, like a Catherine-wheel without the rim; and there a glittering mass, which is a living jelly. Vast specimens of what may possibly form mermaids' chignons, sea-weeds of all

* "The speckled sort are the most credulous of the species."—*Buffon*.

sorts, strew the shore, or hang from the treacherous rocks, which are now left bare. Upon these, our new acquaintance, on his listless stroll, occasionally slips and slides, when his language is such as would shock Mr. Gosse, or any other admirer of the Common Objects of the Sea-shore.

Mr. Roberts anathematizes all these candidates for an aquarium under the generic but unscientific term of "slime;" and when a shell prettier than its fellows attracts his attention, he manifests his interest in the dainty treasure by scrunching it beneath his heel; or when he comes across a star-fish larger and more radiant than common, he kicks it limb from limb—in default (one would say, to judge by his evil looks) of something human that would feel pain more. It is evident that this gentleman's temper, perhaps not naturally angelic, has of late been sadly "tried," and that it has broken down under the ordeal. "A month more," he once more soliloquizes, "of kicking one's heels in this confounded island! One might just as well have been born a savage, as live as I have been living during the last year. Nothing to see but salt water, nothing to hear but salt water—and what an infernal row it can make! nothing to eat but what comes out of the salt water, and nothing to drink"—he took out his now empty brandy-flask, and surveyed it with a reproachful air—"yes, nothing to drink but salt water. Then, when the time does come to get away, it will be the windy season, and I may be kept here for weeks by the salt water. I am not going to trust myself in one of those cockle-shells of boats that they use in these parts—no, not if I know it, unless the sea is as smooth as a duck-pond. Why, it was just by that rock yonder that I saw two go down only last March; it was more exciting than a play; six men and a woman, and all drowned. I only wish that brute Richardson had been one of them. The idea of his giving me only half the money I had so richly earned, and refusing to pay the other half until the last day I was to be here, just to make himself certain of my remaining, and not coming home to trouble him, I suppose, the selfish, unfeeling scoundrel! I have a precious good mind to peach upon him yet. It's all very well for him to say it could do me no good to have him lagged as well as myself; but it would have done me a deal of good. One of the bitterest morsels I have had in my mouth these five years was the thought, that that villain got off scot-free when I was punished, and has been living in clover ever since. But once I get the rest of that little consideration paid up, I'll worry him; I'll pay him out for keeping me in this cursed place until the last minute. If he couldn't have helped the other thing, he could have helped *that*. Pay him out? ay, it shall go hard if I don't pay out every body!"

In this misanthropical frame of mind, Mr. William Roberts proceeded to complete his toilet, and then to climb the cliff-path that led by the side of the waterfall aforesaid into the garden ground about the inn.

On the lawn in front of the house stood a woman middle-aged, but with some traces of beauty about her still; her hazel eyes would have been very handsome were it not for the timidity of their expression; and their features would have been well shaped, but that they were so wan. Though she did not look like a lady, the smile which came into her face as she caught sight of Mr. Roberts was very sweet, and her voice sounded gentle and tender as she called out in indifferent English: "My dear Bill, how late you are! The coffee is getting quite cold."

"Then take care it gets warm again, that's all," was the growling and unreasonable response.

The smile remained, but flickering indecisively, as though half afraid to stay upon her lips, and the voice was troubled and timid as it continued: "You have been more than an hour, Bill; I almost began to think you were never coming."

"And devilish sorry you'd have been, I dare say, if I never had come," answered the man gruffly. "Oh, yes, I know." She had come forward to meet him, and tried to put her hand on his shoulder lovingly, but he fenced it off. "You are like dogs, you women, uncommon affectionate to those you are afraid off."

"I was not afraid of you when I married you, Bill," said she reproachfully, but still with a tenderness in her tone.

"Was you not? Then that only shows you must have been a most odacious young fool. But you ain't a fool *now*, at least in that respect, I reckon. You learned who was to be master *precious soon*;" and Mr. Roberts for the first time that morning indulged himself with a burst of merriment.

"I did indeed, Bill," sighed the woman wearily; and turning from him to hide her tears, she led the way into the house.

CHAPTER XII.

MR. ROBERTS AT HOME.

It was a pleasant chamber enough, if somewhat scantily furnished, where Mr. and Mrs. Roberts sat at breakfast; and the table was plentifully supplied not only with well-cooked fish, but various potted meats and preserved delicacies. The room and its accessories, indeed, would have been pronounced by any impartial looker-on as much superior to what are commonly used by those in the same station in life as Mr. and Mrs. Roberts. Yet one of the pair at least, seemed greatly dissatisfied with what was provided for him; his language to the fried soles was shocking, and the coffee was consigned to a much warmer place than the kitchen before he sent it out thither to be heated. But after he had eaten and drunk, although his appetite (by reason of his previous devotion to the brandy) was by no means so good as his friends might have wished it to be,

Mr. Roberts grew somewhat mollified, and by the time he had lit his pipe and smoked a little, could be addressed, as the partner of his fortunes was well aware, without dread of immediate personal violence. As this favorable opportunity never lasted long, nor recurred before the same time on the morrow, it was highly necessary, if his lady had any wish for conversation, to take advantage of it; and she did so upon the present occasion.

"The packet will be here at ten o'clock or so, my dear, our landlady tells me. It has been sighted an hour ago. Perhaps it will bring us some letters."

"Who *wants* letters? I don't," was the discouraging rejoinder.

"But it is so very long, Bill, since we have heard any thing from—from your folks at home."

"For my part, I hope it will be longer. Who *wants* to hear? say I again. What is the good of hearing, unless, indeed, it was to say that the old man was dead!"

"Oh, Bill, how can you talk so!"

"Ah, yes, that's mighty fine. You can afford to be shocked, you can, because, you lucky slut, you never had a father, leastways as I ever heard on. I say, in your case, there never was an old chap of the age of Methuselah living on and on, as though Death had forgotten him, and standing between his only son and his expectations. Father indeed! A nice father he's been to me. Why, he wouldn't even get into the witness-box, and swear me off before the beaks, as he might ha' done, and prevented all what happened afterwards, including my being moped to death on this precious island."

"And yet, dear, I am sure we have never lived half so well, or been half so comfortable, and free from cares and fears, as we have been here."

"And who have you got to thank for *that* but me?" was the inconsistent reply. "Wasn't it my doing? Haven't I paid for it not only with money earned, but with my skin?"

"Indeed, dear Bill, I do think I suffered almost as much as you, while you were being so pun—so ill-used."

"Do you? Then all I can say is, you are most confoundedly mistaken. Bread and water, and hard work—not to mention being cooped up within stone walls—are a deal worse, let me tell you, than any hurt done to the feelings. I wish they had tried to hurt *my* feelings, instead of what they did do. I wish it had been my father as they put in quod, instead of me; and then you would have seen how patiently I would have put up with it."

"I know it must have been bad, Bill. My heart bled for you all the time; it did indeed. And I do hope—oh, I do so hope—that you may never again do any thing as may bring you into such trouble again!"

"If you go on talking like that," muttered Mr. Roberts with an ugly look, "I shall bring myself into trouble with a vengeance, and that upon your own account, you white-faced fool. 'Tisn't it bad enough to have this misfortune

thrown in my face by other people, or, at least, of running the risk of having it thrown, wherever I am, wherever I go, without *you* doing it?"

"Then why not stay here, Bill?" interrupted the woman, clasping her hands, and speaking very hurriedly. "No one knows it here, no one ever can know it. We have enough and to spare for a long time to come to keep us as we are living now; and who knows but that before it is all gone, those expectations of which you speak may turn to realities? I will work for you, slave for you. The seigneur's lady told me only yesterday that my lace-work, if I should ever need to sell it, would fetch a great deal among some great folks she knows. Let us stay here, where you are safe, and out of temptation. Oh, never let us go back again to where all is suspicion, and fear, and danger, and one never knows what shame and sorrow the morrow may bring forth. We have never been so well off as we are here. What a pleasant house this is to dwell in; and only think how cheap in this place are the things you value most—more, I sometimes think, even than me—the brandy, and the wine, and the tobacco."

"There is something in *that*," observed Mr. Roberts moodily, "although all the rest is twaddle, except about the lace-work. I don't forbid you to sell any thing for what it will fetch, only you must say it's for a charity, and not for ourselves. It will never do to let folks here suppose that I am any thing else than a gentleman living upon his independent means, as indeed I am."

As he sat with his feet lodged on the corner of the table, squirting tobacco-juice upon the carpet, and occasionally using a fork instead of a toothpick, the islanders (including the seigneur's lady) must have been insular indeed if they assigned to Mr. William Roberts the social rank which he thus arrogated to himself; but it was plain that the speaker entertained no doubt of their credulity.

If Mrs. Roberts had had a little more of that wisdom so often attributed to her sex, and which the serpent, perhaps, gave to Eve in not excessive compensation for damages, she would have permitted her husband to chew undisturbed that cud of reflection for which he was now obviously inclined, and left the seed of her suggestion alone to germ and ripen of itself. But she imprudently renewed her solicitations.

"Dear Bill," she recommenced, "you can not think how I wish I could persuade you not to leave this place until some really better fortune smiles upon you. We have nothing to complain of here—"

"What!" broke in the man impatiently, nothing to complain of? It is all very well for *you*, who have got me all to yourself, to cozen and make a fool of, but it's not well for *me*. Why, I have not a soul to speak to from morning to night. Even if there is any body worth speaking to, which I deny, they can jabber nothing else but French. Do you think I am one of those idiots who can stare at the sky and sea

all day, and want no other society than gulls and kittiwakes, like that painter who was here last month!—*You?* Yes, of course, I have *you*, who, however, are neither so young nor so pretty as you used to be.—There, you need not cry, you ninny; it's no fault of yours, of course, and I don't say but what you are well enough in your way; only a man wants a man to talk to him, and to smoke with him, and to drink with him. You are no *company* to a long-headed fellow like me—how should you be?"

"I am very sorry, Bill," replied the woman sadly; "I do my best. There was a time when you said you could be happy with me anywhere, and I am sure this place, of all others that I have seen or read of, seems made to be happy in." And she turned towards the window, as though to gaze upon the fair prospect it afforded, or perhaps to hide her tears.

"I wonder where, now, did this woman pick up that sort of nonsense?" observed Mr. William Roberts, soliloquizing. "Not from her mother, if all tales I have heard of her be true; and not from Jem Dean, the trainer, who brought her up. I wonder whether he *was* her uncle? He ought to have been something nearer, since he gave her a hundred pounds as a wedding dowry; and yet she never could have inherited such notions from him. Well, I suppose I must humor her a bit, so long as we are shut up alone together in this wretched hole.—Look here, Bess; I am not angry with you, you know; why should I be? It's only that I felt a little moped."

"I am glad it was only that, Bill," returned she quietly, but still keeping her face averted.

"Of course it was.—Now, don't be in the sulks: remember what my mother told you, that you would always find me a good husband, if only you kept a smiling face. But I do hate *black looks*, and especially in one's wife."

Mrs. Roberts sighed; and turning from the window came towards her husband with the smile required. "Your mother was always very fond of you, Bill, and I am afraid she spoiled you just a little."

"My father made up for that," was the sulken reply, "for he never had a civil word to say to me; and as for the old woman, she seems to have got over her extreme devotion to her offspring, since she has not written to me for near a twelvemonth."

"Well, Bill, you must allow you don't give much encouragement to your correspondents, as you never answer their letters."

"Why should I, when they've got nothing inside of 'em? I answered Richardson's sharp enough when he sent me half that money instead of the whole of it—curse him! What's the good of such letters? Why, the very last from the old woman had nothing else in it than the news that Ellen was likely to marry that stuck-up fellow John Denton, as if I wanted to hear any thing about her, and much less that. I hate her, and I hate the man!"

"Why should you hate poor Ellen, Bill?"

returned Mrs. Roberts with some faint show of excitement in her tone. "I'm sure she has never knowingly done you any harm."

"Knowingly or not, she has done me harm, and it's my belief she's a precious cunning minx. Why has my father taken such a fancy to her, instead of to me? It is true that I do not care a snap of the fingers whether he cottons to me or not, since nothing can possibly come of it as matters stand; but in case he ever came into that property about which he was always dreaming, it would be a pretty thing if that slip of a girl should get a great slice of it: you would see the harm of it then, quick enough, I suppose."

"I am sure, Bill, in such a case, and provided that there was plenty left for you, I should never grudge her what she got, for she has been a real good friend to us, and always did her best to reconcile her grandfather with you. Indeed, but for her, we should never have been married at all."

"And how do I know—supposing, for the sake of argument, that our marriage has turned out the success you seem to take for granted—that that was not all a scheme of hers to set my father against me for good and all?"

"A scheme, Bill! Why, Nellie was but a child when she persuaded her grandfather, with her pretty artless ways, to give his consent to our wedding; and if it was a scheme, your mother was also concerned in it, and I don't suppose you would impute any evil motive to her?"

"Well, I don't suppose she *meant* any harm," returned Mr. Roberts with a sneer, "although she may have *done* harm for all that."

"In getting you married to me, William?"

"I didn't say so, though you may wear it if the cap fits. You seem most uncommon cantankerous this morning. All that I intended to observe was, that I don't believe Miss Ellen is such an innocent dove as you paint her."

"She was wonderful kind and good to me—kinder even than your mother—when you were in trouble, Bill, that's all I've got to say."

"You're wise then, ma'am; for you have already said more than enough. When I observe, 'I hate this man, or this woman'—for which, too, I happen to have good reasons—I do not wish to hear their virtues descanted upon. For the future, understand that, if you please."

There was a long pause. Then, in a tone which was intended to be propitiatory, Mr. Roberts observed: "Didn't you say the packet would be coming in about ten o'clock, Bess? I think I shall take a stroll down to the harbor."

The change of voice, even though it was but the alteration from downright menace to bare civility, called up the color in the woman's cheeks as she caught up his straw-hat, with anxious eagerness to please, and placed it upon his head. Mr. Roberts nodded in gracious acknowledgment of this service. "I dare say you'd like to come with me yourself?" growled he reluctantly.

"Indeed—indeed, I should Bill," cried she joyfully. "We have not been out for a walk together for weeks, and it's such a beautiful day! I will not keep you two minutes while I put on my bonnet." And off she ran up-stairs.

"She ought to go on with that lace-work," muttered Mr. William Roberts discontentedly. "If she really can get money for it, every hour she wastes is a dead loss to me. I am afraid I am spoiling Mrs. W. R. with these sort of treats. But however it's only once and away; and I'll see that she works all the harder." The sense of this excessive indulgence of Mrs. W. R.'s fancy seemed presently, however, to affect his temper. "Come, be quick, can't you! I'm not going to wait here all day," bellowed he from the foot of the stairs; and with that he lounged out of the house alone, leaving his wife to follow him.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE MIST OF BLOOD.

PERHAPS one of the secrets of the happiness of this happy isle (which let us call Formosa) was, that there was no regular post; no pestiferous missives waiting on the breakfast-table to introduce us at once to a world of cares. Letters came, of course, but at no stated times, and only as convenience offered—that is to say, when a sailing-packet, or even a pleasure-boat, happened to come over from the neighboring and larger island, between which and England intercourse was direct and constant enough. If the winds were violent, or contrary, correspondence was intermitted for whole weeks together; while, as for public matters—things such as the newspapers chronicle—the inhabitants of this blessed spot knew nothing whatever of them until they became matters of history, and cared nothing for them even then. The Norman Conquest was the last event of general interest that had any particular bearing on Formosa and its affairs.

The arrival of this occasional sailing-packet, of which the mistress of the inn had spoken, was quite an event in the island. It generally brought over a crowd of excursionists; such of whom as sea-sickness had not too much prostrated, dispersed themselves all over the place, to the admiration of the natives. It was hard to say which was most astonished by the aspect of the other—the visitors (mostly imported from London into the larger island by a steamer, for which the little harbor of Formosa offered no accommodation) or the aborigines. The former of necessity brought their own provisions, and picnicked on the shore, or in sheltered hollows of the downs; the latter (or at least the juvenile part of them) stood round at a respectful distance, listening with rapture to the popping of the pale-ale corks, and hoping that a goodly store of empty bottles would presently reward their patience, as it commonly did: if not the rose, they had been near the rose, and smelt very strong of it; and the water that the native ur-

chins poured into the same, was held to be almost beer, and drunk with due approval.

On the present occasion, the news of the coming packet had spread through the three miles and a half which constitutes the length of Formosa, and the mile and half to *six feet* that forms its breadth. From many a sheltered farm or cottage, nestling in its few yards of Devon-like lane, trooped forth the island folk towards the harbor; and Mr. William Roberts and his wife went with them. Calm as was the day, it was pleasant to see the little vessel, as it neared the land and met the recoiling waves, bury its prow beneath them, and rise and dip again, till its wet decks shone in the sun, and to hear the predictions, uttered in the Formosa tongue, concerning the condition of the expected voyagers. Youth at the stern, and Pleasure at the prow—or *vice versa*—or amidstships, have never yet reached that island shore without a preparatory tossing: and to-day formed no exception. But, to the great disappointment of the natives, there was no excursion-party this particular morning on board at all; the packet was only laden with stores—some to stock the seigneur's house—which is quite a mansion for these parts—and some for the landlady of the inn. "And, by-the-by," said the skipper, as he made over her property to the latter lady, "the postmaster asked me to bring this 'ere for some gentleman who is staying at your house, I believe;" and with that, he handed her a letter, directed to "William Roberts, Esq., Formosa, Channel Islands."

"Didn't I say, Bill, that I thought you would get a letter this morning?" exclaimed Mrs. Roberts, as her husband took the epistle, and stood with it in his hand, regarding the superscription with much dissatisfaction.

"Well, and what if you did? It's no great treasure now it has come. It is not from Richardson with the rest of the dibs, as I half hoped it might be; it's only from the old woman;" and he roughly disengaged his arm from his wife's fingers, and tore open the envelope with contempt.

"But what does she say, Bill?—Good heavens, how strange you look! Are they all well at the cottage? Nothing is wrong with Nelly, I do trust?"

She peeped over his shoulder—her fear of her husband lost for the moment in her anxiety to learn the news—but he pushed her back with his elbow before she could read a line, and thrust the missive into his pocket.

"You mind your own business, will you? The letter is mine, not yours; and just because you are so prying, you sha'n't see it.—No, there's nobody ill—*there*, I'll tell you that much; and there's no news at all, at least that you have any thing to do with.—Now, go home. You make all these idiots as curious as yourself. Go home, I say; I wish to be alone." And with that he turned upon his heel, and walked hastily towards the little tunnel that led into the interior of the island.

The violence of his language and demeanor had attracted quite a little crowd of wondering folk about them, and among them the kind-hearted woman of the inn.

"I am afraid, ma'am," said she simply, and in imperfect English, "that that was bad news I gave your husband, since it has put him out so."

"Yes, that was it," replied Mrs. Roberts eagerly. "It took him so by surprise, that he was scarcely master of himself, poor fellow."

"He need not have been angry with you, however, since you didn't write it. But that's the way of the men. When the nets break, or the fish don't come, it's always us wives who suffer for it."

This remark seemed to be so philosophic and noteworthy, that the speaker translated it into the local tongue for the benefit of her fellow-countrywomen who stood round, from whom there at once broke forth unanimous demonstrations of assent.

"Yet my good man is a better one than he, thank God!" said one with a glance at Mr. William Roberts's retreating figure.

"You are right, Annette," said the landlady, "for if ever there was a pig and a coward it is that one, and this poor unhappy creature has to bear with him."

Mrs. Roberts was fortunately wholly ignorant of the Formosa dialect, so that for all she knew the sympathy expressed in the faces around her extended to her husband as well as herself; without the least idea of undutifulness, therefore, she nodded and smiled gratefully, by way of reply, and then made her way, like an obedient wife as she was, to the house she had so lately quitted.

In the mean time, the rapid strides of her late companion had carried him far away into the solitude he desired. The six feet of soil to which, as I have said, the breadth of Formosa did at one spot dwindle, was, in fact, the summit of a lofty ridge, which connected, as by an isthmus, one portion of the island with the other, the smaller, which was hence called Little Formosa, as though it were an independent territory. This narrow pathway, which might have been defended by half a dozen men against a host unprovided with firearms, formed, in fact, a sort of natural bridge, and was one of the most remarkable of human highways. It was nearly five hundred feet long, and totally unprotected on either side from precipices that sank sheer into the sea at least an equal distance. Across this Roberts made his way, not without tremors, and sat down beneath the shadow of a huge rock on the farther side. Wrapped as he was in his own selfish thoughts, the solitude and grandeur of the scene around him had yet some effect even upon his sordid mind. The distant and unknown continent to eastward, the illimitable sea on north and south, and the perilous track he had just traversed, and which seemed to cut him off from his fellow-men, struck him with that sort of awe which perhaps the devils feel who believe and tremble. His mind, like theirs,

was full of evil; and yet the news of what was certainly a great piece of good-fortune had just arrived to him. With one more look around, to make sure that he was alone, he set himself to read the letter, whose tidings he had gathered but from a single glance. These were couched in affectionate terms indeed, though the form of expression touched him not at all.

"MY DEAREST WILLY—At last our dreams have come true, and we are rich folks forever! I write this letter from Redcombe Manor, the home of your fathers, and the place, dear boy, which you will one day inherit. That thought, Willy, is the one that has ever been uppermost in my mind ever since this glad newscame. Henceforward, I feel sure you will be no cause of sorrow to your parents. You will have no temptation to do wrong, and you will be grateful to God, who has thus henceforth placed you above temptation. My heart is very full, Willy. I write this under the roof where, fifty years ago, I was but a servant, and now I am the mistress of it all. But my own altered position is nothing compared with the change that is awaiting you. It is this, above all things, for which I thank Heaven on my bended knees. Your father has forgiven you, and all will be now well—I feel, I am sure it will. You will give your enemies—those who must now needs be jealous of you, I mean—no opportunity of evil-speaking for the future. You will be a new man. Come home, then, darling, to wealth and happiness, and your loving mother's arms. Let us be a united family. Bess will be welcome too. It is not for me, of all people, to make objections to her upon the ground of her low birth, although, of course, under the circumstances, it seems a pity now that your marriage took place, since any girl in the country would be proud and happy to wed you. But be sure you give Bess my love, and Ellen's. It has been decided that Ellen's match is to be broken off with John Denton. She is to be the bride, your father says, of some great man, perhaps a lord. I am all in a whirl, and scarcely know what I write; but I know this, that until I see my boy here, I shall take no pleasure in the splendor and plenty that surround me. Come then, come home, my darling, to your loving mother,

"MARY BLACKBURN.

"Of course, I direct this letter as usual, but you will henceforth bear your own name, and, I am sure, will never again"—the "again" was carefully crossed out, but William Roberts deciphered it, and it made his brow grow very dark—"will never disgrace it. We give out that you have been abroad—for your health."

Of all the contents of this epistle, next to the news itself which it conveyed, one sentence affected the reader most, and indeed seemed to stand out from the rest, as though it had been written in some different color; and yet it had probably been set down by the writer with less

thought than she had given to any other part of the composition, since it was in truth a mere incontrovertible statement of fact: "*Although, of course, under the circumstances, it seems a pity now that your marriage took place.*"

"A pity!" muttered William Blackburn, as we may now call him: "it is a Curse which will cling to me forever. That woman will be a millstone round my neck. To think that such a withered, white-faced jade should stand forever between me and this good luck!—'*Any girl in the country would be proud and happy to wed you.*'—Of course she would; but what's the use of that when I'm married already? Miss Ellen foresaw this when she coaxed father over to give his consent to it. She's a cunning fox, if ever there was one; but I will be even with her yet. She thinks to make some splendid match, quite different from mine, does she, and to look down upon her uncle chained to this log, this drudge!" His passion was frightful to witness. He clenched his fist, and shook it at the broad bright sun in impotent malice. He scowled at the smiling sea, that lay so far beneath him that he could scarcely hear it lap upon the crags; and as he did so, a darker scheme than any that had ever yet crossed his brain came over it. It made his cheeks pale and his frame tremble, as though with sudden cold; and from mere dread of dwelling on it, he took up the letter again, and read it half through, stopping at that same paragraph which seemed to him now to be inscribed in letters of blood. "A pity to have thus thrown himself away! Yes, it was indeed a woeful misfortune to have tied himself to this faded fool; but was it necessarily an irremediable one? Suppose she were to die!"

A cloud came between earth and sun; and William Blackburn started up in terror, for, for the moment, he thought the shadow of some spectator was upon him reading what he read, and somehow cognizant of the thought he thought. But he was quite alone. No eye of man was on him; no sound nor trace of man was to be heard nor seen. About a solitary pinnacle of rock that stood in the sea, like the steeple of some church submerged, a cloud of sea-fowl clanged and clung afar off; but there was no other sign of life; not a sail flecked the sea, nor pennon of smoke above a steamer's track marred the clear sky.

"Suppose she were to die!" She was thin and pale enough to be near death; while he, on the other hand, was robust and strong. She had always been ailing ever since he had known her, and that was of itself a trouble and a nuisance, and very hard upon any husband, surely. But creaking doors hang long, and how many years might she not last? Years? Nay, if once he took her back with him to Redcombe, would not mischief be done enough to last for many a year. What young girl of family and fortune, such as this letter spoke of, would care to be the second to such a first?—the natural daughter of some turfite, and whose mother (for all he knew) might be alive even yet, and turn up some day

to cloud his prospects still more darkly. Once let it be known that he had become rich, and his wife was likely to find relatives enough and to spare. Uncle Dean was not a nice sort of connection to begin with, and knew a great deal more about his nephew by marriage than was convenient. Richardson himself had known the girl years ago. She would prove a link with the very set with which, above all things, it was necessary for him to break off. Then there came into his mind, unbidden, a certain story of a man and wife, who, being poor and miserable, had agreed to die together, the one being in earnest, and the other not. The woman, who dearly loved her husband, was anxious to escape with him into some other world which might be less cruel; but the man desired to remain in this one, only to be quit of his wife. It was decided that they should take some instantaneous poison, sitting back to back, so (as the man suggested) they might not watch each other's dying agonies; and the wife died accordingly; but her cunning mate did but pretend to take his portion, and lived on, a free and unencumbered man.

This tale had struck him when he first heard of it, and he had often recalled its details; but now he seemed to see the crime enacted as in a picture, and he recognized the features of the woman well—for it was Bess.

Once more, as if to escape from his own thoughts, he applied himself to the letter. Thousand devils! what was this? He could scarcely read a line. Was his sight failing? A thick red mist, almost as red as blood, seemed to pervade all things. His very hands were damp with it, and he held them close to his eyes to convince himself that it was not really blood upon them. The ocean had disappeared from beneath him; the sea-fowl had ceased to scream. Something, he knew not what, such as he had somewhere read of, must have happened to his brain, and he was going to be very ill. He would go back to Bess at once, who knew something of doctoring, and was, at all events, an excellent nurse. He rose and groped his way towards home. How dear it seemed to him now, that place where kindly hands and loving tenderness was awaiting him, if only he could but get there! His alarm about the state of his health was so absorbing, that for a few minutes he forgot the perilous nature of the path he was pursuing, when suddenly a light breeze touched his face, and the red mist, which was only a sudden sea-fog of intense thickness, which the sun-rays colored luridly, but strove to penetrate in vain, was lifted for a moment like the corner of a curtain, and showed him where he was. Upon either side a sheer precipice, and before and behind him that unprotected tract he had even shuddered to tread in the broad daylight. He saw the white foam gleaming, and the cruel jagged rocks pointing up at him hundreds of feet below, and then the curtain dropped again. To go on, to go back, in that palpable darkness, was equally to die. Even to stand where he

was, with his brain turning round—for this time the blood was really rushing to his brain—and his knees knocking together, as they did, in the extremity of his terror, was almost as perilous. But he slowly sank down on his knees, and stretching himself out at full length upon the narrow way, clutched its rocky edges with both hands. "I never meant to kill her; I swear I never did," murmured the wretched creature in his agony; for it seemed to him, indeed, as though hell was gaping wide for him. "She has been a good wife to me, better than I deserve; and why should I wish her dead?"

Had it not been for the deep humiliation of the moral spectacle which he thus afforded, any thing more ludicrous than the position of Mr. William Roberts it would be impossible to conceive. He resembled more than any thing human, one of those vermin which we see stretched out and nailed to the barn-doors by some in-artistic gamekeeper. Nay, in contrast with the sublime grandeur that lay around him—in the awful presence which Nature showed—he looked more loathsome and grovelling than any such mere creeping thing. And there he lay, for nearly an hour, until the veil was lifted from the face of the sun, and earth and sky and sea once more rejoiced in the summer noontide. Then he rose, though trembling still, and made his way to safety and what was by comparison the mainland, where he relieved his feelings by a long string of execrations.

Again he sat down, and conned the letter, the contents of which one would have imagined he had by this time learned by heart: but so far was this from being the case, that he suddenly struck it with his hand, and leaped up with a curse, as though some adder had lain hidden in its folds, and bitten him. "What's this?" cried he aloud, and pointing to the date at the top of the sheet, which had hitherto escaped his notice. "'September,' she writes here, and this is August! Why, I ought to have received this news a year ago."

CHAPTER XIV.

IT IS AN ILL WIND THAT BLOWS NOBODY GOOD.

Of course, folks do occasionally receive letters a little late, if one may believe the correspondents of the *Times*, who write with such indignation to complain of no less than three-quarters of an hour's delay in their suburban delivery; the nature of things compels, also, some to come to hand considerably after date, as when a missive arrives from the Underworld (as it often does), the writer of which may have done with either hemisphere four months before we get it, and learn the poor soul's intention to "come home" for good by the next mail; but the delay of eleven months in the transmission of a missive from England to the Channel Islands was certainly quite unaccountable, notwithstanding the irregular postal arrangements of Formosa. What might not have happened at Red-

combe Manor between the time of that letter's dispatch and of its arrival! was the thought that now drove its recipient almost frantic. And why, when she received no answer, did not his mother write again? Perhaps the old woman was dead, and his father and niece had been left to carry on their schemes against him without any opposition! Ellen might have married by this time, and secured an ample settlement at his own expense; or the old man might have died, and left her his sole heiress!

One thing only presented itself to his mind in the shape of comfort, if such a word as comfort can be applied to such a mind. If he had been so long kept in ignorance of matters at Redcombe, they also—the folks at home—were equally in the dark with respect to *his* affairs, nor were they curious, as he was, to learn what during the intervening period might have happened. He had not the character of a good correspondent; indeed, his mother and Ellen both knew him far too well to expect to hear from him about any thing, while his father appeared to entertain no interest in him whatsoever. It would, therefore, not astonish the family that he should have delayed to communicate to them the intelligence of any occurrence, no matter of what importance. And, perhaps, in reply to this same letter, and before he appeared at the Manor-house in person, he might have certain news to send them of some moment.

Should this news be true or false? was the question which, his first burst of passion having subsided, Mr. William Blackburn was now meditating as he strolled slowly homeward. It lay within his own power to make it either true or false, and the reflection that in the one case he would be telling a lie did not, we may be sure, affect the balance by a feather's weight. He had chosen purposely an indirect and unfrequented route across the fields, and his devious footsteps presently brought him to a very singular spot, which would, anywhere else but in Formosa, have been held in great esteem as a local lion. A huge circular hole, descending into what was shore at low tide, and sea at high, lay immediately before him. It was set in a green field, and the edges of the dreadful place were gay with wild-flowers—but it looked all the more terrible for these peaceful accessories. The noise of the waves, when the tide was up, as now, could be heard even on so calm a day at a great distance off, like muffled thunder; and in storm, the roaring of the imprisoned sea there pervaded the whole isle; but not in the wildest tempest had its foam been seen above the chasm. It boiled and raged as in some mighty caldron, but it could not boil over, by reason of the depth of the place, which was many hundred feet. To this abyss the approach was wholly unprotected, since it had generally a warning voice of its own, that no one could fail to hear. Attracted by the sound, although he had heard it many a time before, Mr. William Blackburn once more assumed that abject attitude which became his character so well, and crawled on hands and

knees to the very brink. He had been told a legend of some small spaniel, which had been caught by the tide in this awful spot, making its way to the surface and escaping; but it required faith indeed in whomsoever had once looked down "the well-hole" to believe such a tale. The feat could never have been accomplished by any wingless creature. Whatever living thing on four feet, or on two, might have been so imprudent as to venture in there while the rising tide was near the mouth, must, without doubt, have perished; while, if a man fell over from above, he would either be dashed to pieces on the rock-strewn floor, or drowned, and presently carried out to sea, never to be beheld again. And "how easily," thought Mr. William Blackburn, "if he were curious and not careful, a man *might* fall over this unprotected rim—or a woman!"

This line of thought, which, when he commenced it a few hours ago, had given him some disturbance, and later, even remorse, was now pursued by him without scruple. It was no longer startling, since it was not new; and as for that brief access of regret at having entertained it, he considered himself to have been taken unfair advantage of in the matter—to have been actuated by bodily fear, under which influence the law absolves us from all promises, and much more therefore from mere mental resolutions. There are many men of this same description, and whose ideas perhaps only require the same circumstances to flow in the same hideous channel. Mere Egotists—though, fortunately, the sufficiently momentous occasion does not often tempt them—are always prepared to carry out their principles to the end. They regard the supreme Providence as another Ego, with whose will their own is sometimes unhappily at variance; but they hope to have their own way, on any really serious point, nevertheless. Moreover, Mr. William Blackburn was not altogether singular in his secret belief, that there was not such a very great inequality between those two egos; not, indeed, in importance (albeit the sense of his own importance was overwhelming, and outweighed that of all the rest of the human family), but in power. That is to say, although when sick, or at sea (or lying on his stomach, with a precipice on each side of him), he was ready enough to acknowledge his inferiority, when in rude health, and standing on *terra firma*, it seemed to him (notwithstanding he would have been slow to acknowledge it) that himself and the Supreme Government of the Universe were upon pretty equal terms. Whatever may be false in the philosophy of persons of this description, they are all eminently practical. The absence of the gentler emotions and all soft influences from external nature, as well as (in the present case at least) the moral deafness to all charms of literature and art, leave their mind free, and clear, as it were, its decks for *action*. Thus, many a more powerful intellect, in the contemplation of such a deed as that with which Mr. William Blackburn's

brain was busy, would have embarrassed itself with *pros* and *cons* of a more or less sentimental sort, even after the question was virtually decided. But it was not so with him; having once settled the matter, he could give all his attention to details. He took out his watch, and calculated how much time he had to *complete his arrangements* before leaving the island, as he had resolved to do by the same packet that had brought him the letter. He did not like trusting himself, even in that calm weather, in a fishing-boat, since storms arose so suddenly in those treacherous seas. There was, he had noticed, a good deal of unlading to be done, and he knew the skipper had relatives in Formosa whom he would probably visit, so that it was almost certain the vessel would remain until late in the afternoon. He had, therefore, three or four good hours to spare.

There were two considerations, however, which troubled him a good deal. The tide would soon be going out, and leave the well-hole bare and open to observation both from above and below; so that if an accident, such as he anticipated, were to happen to any body before evening, there would be some chance, however small, of its being discovered. This was certainly unlucky. Secondly, he bitterly regretted having acted so roughly towards his wife in the presence of so many people on the beach that morning. This might be construed by them as a serious domestic quarrel, instead of the very usual incident that it really was, and, in case of her immediate disappearance, might excite suspicion against him. These two circumstances gave him considerable uneasiness, and even caused him to waver in the resolution he had formed. Yet he could not put off the matter in hand for a more seasonable opportunity; his impatience to reach Redcombe Manor was too feverish and absorbing; and there was no knowing within a week or two when the packet might come again. Moreover, although so entirely free from sentimental feelings, there was something unpleasant to him in the idea of sharing the same bed and board with one whom he had thus predestinated to disappear; and if, after his plan had been effected, no matter how satisfactorily, he should be fated to be left for several days and nights alone at Formosa—within hearing of this well-hole music too—that he foresaw would be very unpleasant also. If Mr. William Blackburn occasionally showed himself careless of the interests and feelings of others, it must be confessed that in his own affairs, he was provident and considerate in a very high degree.

He had not dismissed this idea of procrastinating the matter in a hurry; his flesh had crept a little, but his judicial mind had given the proposition fair play. He had thought of sending a letter by the packet, to tell his mother that Bess had been dead these three months, before putting in an appearance at the Manor himself. But, notwithstanding the extraordinary seclusion of the island, and the mutual ig-

norance of its inhabitants and those of the world without, respecting one another, he had felt this was a too dangerous game to play. Having therefore decided on his own immediate departure, there was no time to be lost in the arrangements. Would it be better—would it excite suspicion, or lull it, to secure his passage by the packet at once or later? He was already calculating the consequences of the act which he had resolved to perpetrate; and perhaps he turned his thoughts thither the more readily, since otherwise they would have busied themselves with the act itself, which was not an agreeable topic, and from which, to say truth, he shrank. It must be understood that the idea of disembarassing himself from his life-companion was by no means a new one to Mr. William Blackburn, although, until that morning, it had never taken any practical shape, and far less that terrible one which he was thus so averse to contemplate in detail. He had been married for many years, and had long regretted the circumstance. He had got tired of his wife with the most fashionable speed, and even before he had spent that dowry of a hundred pounds, which had been one of her chief attractions to him. She was by no means a lady whose character might have formed the back-bone of a moral tract, but she was a great deal too good for Mr. Blackburn, and he resented it. She annoyed him, as we have seen, by defending certain members of his family from his reproaches, and thereby indirectly accusing him of ingratitude. She had not sympathized with his transgressions of the law, had always warned him of what came of them, and, worse than all, she had proved herself a prophet.

True, she had that mysterious fondness for him that women so often entertain for absolutely worthless scoundrels, but that, he reasoned, was but his due. Moreover, it had its disadvantage, for it made her jealous. She was no longer pretty nor young; and although she must needs have been aware of her deficiencies in that respect, she had by no means evinced a dutiful resignation upon one or two occasions, when she had reason to suspect him of transferring his affections elsewhere. In short, she had been a clog upon him at all times, and one which, so far from his getting accustomed to, had increased in weight and inconvenience yearly; and now that a new life had suddenly unfolded itself before him, which, but for her, must needs be all prosperous enjoyment, he had determined to free himself of her once for all. The opportunities which Formosa afforded for this purpose were such as he would certainly never meet with again; and it seemed such a pity not to take advantage of them. The time would never again be so opportune, nor the risk—and he hated risk—so small. This beautiful island had never been shocked by the spectacle of a coroner's inquest—which was greatly in his favor, to begin with—and he had every reason to hope that it would be spared that calamity upon his account. In the worst possible case, what was

more probable than that a devoted wife, deprived for the first time of her husband, should commit suicide; or that a lady, partial to wild-flowers, should venture too near the brink of the well-hole! In the best and most likely event, the sea would keep his secret safe forevermore. Thus much, in apology, or prudent reflection, crossed and recrossed Mr. William Blackburn's mind, as he once more turned his steps towards the harbor, where the little packet was still lying, as he expected, without any sign of immediate departure. The skipper and crew had gone ashore, leaving but one man on board, whose face was unknown to him.

"What time do you sail?" inquired the intending voyager with an indifferent air.

The man looked up at the sky before he answered, but this the other did not observe, for his eyes were cast down upon the pebbles, with which his feet were busy, though his ears were on the stretch for the reply. "At four o'clock, at latest," answer the sailor. "Are you going with us, sir?"

"Yes. Send up to the inn in an hour's time or so for my luggage."

"Very good, sir. You and your good lady will have the ship all to yourselves to-day, for there is no other passenger."

"My good lady, as you call her, is not coming," answered Mr. Blackburn: "I shall be alone;" and he turned angrily upon his heel. How should this meddling idiot know that he had a wife, or think it necessary to allude to her? It was just a specimen of the way in which he and she were tied together, and it was high time he got quit of her indeed!

He hastily climbed the hill, and crossed the little strip of purple moorland that lay between him and home. From the verge of it he could see her sitting on the lawn with something in her hand, which was probably some foolish story-book, such as she was fond of, full of riddles and the like that never really happen. Her back was towards him, and she could not hear his footsteps on the grassy lane; he drew quite near on the other side of the tall fuchsia-hedge, and plucked at the blossoms nervously. He could now see that she was not reading, but that her fingers were busy with her lace-work, and this vexed him. He had, somehow, rather that his wife had been idling away her time, as usual, than be working for him; at the same time, he did not wish to appear displeased. He had a nod and a smile for her when she looked round at last and caught sight of him. She rose and came towards him hastily, and with a bright face: it was so very seldom that he regarded her so favorably, that she forgot in an instant his angry parting on the beach, and cried out with triumph, holding out the lace: "See, Bill, how hard I've worked! We shall be quite rich people soon at this rate!"

He tried to keep his smile, but his lips twitched uncomfortably, and his eyes shifted beneath her gaze.

"What is the matter, Bill?" asked she with

hesitation, and a touch of fear, for her heart misgave her.

"Nothing, nothing, wench," answered he shortly; "some news has come from home; that's all."

"What! good news, Bill? and yet you do not look as though it were good news."

"Never you mind my looks; I have got something to say to you. Let us walk a bit together somewhere."

"Yes, Bill; I am quite ready."

"But I am not, just yet. I have got to step in first, and put up my things, for I am going by the packet this afternoon."

"What! are we going to leave Formosa, and so soon?"

"No, and yes. I don't want you to ask questions, but—presently—to listen to me. In the mean time I am going to pack my clothes."

"Your clothes, Bill, and not mine? You are going to leave me then? I know you are—forever."

"What a silly fool you are! It is impossible to reason with one who jumps to conclusions so ridiculously. It is necessary that I should start at once, upon business; that is all."

"I would wait for a day or two, if I were you, sir," said a cheery voice close beside him, which made him start and shiver. It was the landlady's husband, with some nets upon his back, returning from the shore.

"Why the devil should I do that?" inquired Mr. Blackburn gruffly.

"Why, because I have heard you say that you are a bad sailor, and the packet is likely to get a pretty tossing. Look out yonder—there are white horses for you."

And, indeed, although, in the sheltered dell where they were standing, the change was almost imperceptible, the wind was rising, and had already changed the face of the sea.

"Yes, it is going to be dirty weather, sir; and you had better be quick with your packing if you really mean to go, for old Gourlay will be for up sail and starting, before matters get worse: we shall have a drop of rain too, and indeed, it's coming on already;" and as he spoke, a few drops pattered on the fuchsias.

"That will stop our walk," said Mr. William Blackburn slowly, with his eyes fixed, not on the gathering clouds, but upon the rising waves.

His landlord's simple phrase: "It is going to be dirty weather," had saved a life. The fact was, though it was still necessary that he should depart, he shrank from trusting himself to the sea in storm, with such a weight in crime upon his soul as he had contemplated, to sink him. Men often abstain from wicked actions, as well as perform them, from such apparently inadequate motives. This, however, was not Mr. Blackburn's own reflection. He felt a touch of spiritual pride; a great temptation had presented itself, and he had put it away from him; there was, as it were, "one to him" scored on the creditor side of the account, between himself and the other Ego. Indeed, it

almost seemed to him that he had laid Providence under an obligation.

Like many other persons who have decided, somewhat against their own inclinations, upon a merciful course of conduct, he now felt himself more than justified in indulging his temper, and saying exactly what he chose to the unconscious object of his clemency. He had been conciliatory and pleasant when his aim was to persuade his wife to take a little walk with him in the picturesque neighborhood of the well-hole; and now that that plan had been suddenly frustrated, he resented, naturally enough, his late unnecessary simulation of good-humor. Moreover, the success of the scheme which his practical mind had at once substituted for his former one, was to be furthered by violence and passion—it was his object now to terrify his wife, as it had been to reassure her—so that his new rôle exactly suited him every way.

"Never mind packing my clothes," commenced he gruffly, when they had got within doors, and she had reached down his travelling trunk from its shelf, and was about to fill it; "I'll do that myself; sit you down upon that chair yonder, and listen." She obeyed; and taking up the little frame, her trembling fingers made pretense to resume her late occupation.

"Curse the lace-work," cried he angrily, as he threw the contents of his wardrobe into the trunk, and stamped upon them to make them lie close; "is it not work enough to listen to me?"

"Yes, Bill, it is indeed."

Her wan face and timid eyes corroborated the fact beyond all force of words.

"Since that's the case," proceeded he coolly, "it must be a comfort to you to think that you will not have to listen much longer. This is the last time you will ever have to do it. We are going to part company forever, we two."

"To part company? What have I done, Bill? What have I said? What—I take Heaven to witness—have I thought, that should make you leave me? Oh, Bill, I love you so, I do indeed—in spite of all,—do not forsake me." She threw herself upon her knees, and strove to catch his hand, but he drew it impatiently away. "You think you will be happier, more secure, and prosperous without me—I know you have thought so often of late—but indeed it will not be so. I love you for your own sake, as no one else, except your mother, does. I can be secret as the grave; and I can work—oh, only let me work, and be your slave!"

"I don't want your work, woman."

"Then you must be rich!" cried she involuntarily: "that letter must have brought the news your father has so long been pining for."

"You are right—it has," answered the other bluntly; "and you shall be rich too, or at least what will seem rich to you. And you shall spend the money here, in the place you like so much, and live here always."

"What! alone?"

"That's as you please," said he with a bru-

tal laugh. "I shall never interfere with you, whoever takes your fancy; and mind you never interfere with *me*, d'y'e hear? for that's the thing I'm coming to. From henceforth, you are Mrs. Roberts or Mrs. any name you like, always excepting Blackburn. It's better not to mince matters; I have had enough of you and to spare."

"Oh, my God!"

"Yes, I know exactly what you are thinking. Is this the reward of all I have done for him? etc. Well, if you choose to put it in that way, yes, it is. I married you, it is true, since that seemed to be the best thing I could do just then; but circumstances alter cases. The best thing I can do now is to become a bachelor.—Don't speak, but listen: if you ever leave this island, or breathe one word of who you really are, or trouble me by any letter"—he had finished his packing now, and turned for the first time his resolute face upon her—"I'll kill you, I will, so help me."

"So help you *who*, Bill? Will Heaven help you to desert a faithful wife—much less to kill her?"

"I don't know; perhaps the devil may insteal; but I will do it as sure as I stand here."

"You will never do it, Bill; you never, never could!"

"Could I not, you fool? I could tell you something that would make you believe me, if it were worth my while. At all events, hear this. When I leave this house, which may be in five minutes, or may be in a quarter of an hour, according to the time when this trunk is fetched, our two lives will be henceforth as separate and apart as though they never had been one. I shall be dead to you; and you will be dead not only to me, but to all other folks who do not live upon this island. I shall myself convey the tidings of your decease—which happened months ago—to my parents and to Ellen. It is not likely that any one else will take the trouble to ask after you; but if they do, I have my answer ready for them. Tomorrow, a disconsolate widower, I shall begin to wear mourning for you. Here is money enough to last you for a month or two; and before it is spent, I shall find an opportunity of sending you some considerable sum; more than I got with you, when you were young and pretty, so that you will have no right to complain; enough, if you please, to buy yourself, even now, another mate."

For the first time for many a day the flush of indignation rose upon her pallid cheeks—for the first time she dared to hold up her thin hand to stop his cruel words. "Your hate is sufficient," said she with despairing calm; "there is no need for insult and foul lies."

"Lies!" cried he, astonished that this worm should turn. "Are you mad, that you venture thus to answer me? This is a dutiful wife indeed, that has been mine so long! I tell lies, do I? You don't believe me when I threaten, perhaps; when I told you, as I tell you again,

that I would squeeze the life out of you with my hands, if ever you cross my path or come between me and my plans in any way. Then listen to this voucher for my words. I had it in my mind this very day—and not an hour ago—to—What's that?"

There was a knock at the door, and the landlady appeared. "There's a sailor, sir, come from the packet for your portmanteau. He says that you must start at once, for the ship sails immediately: the skipper is afraid that a gale is brewing."

"There is the trunk," cried her lodger hurriedly; "let him take it.—A gale brewing? Not much of a gale, I hope. I am ready now—I will not keep him for an instant.—Here, my man, make haste.—Good-by, Bess; you will remember what I told you." He stepped towards her, as though to give her a parting embrace, but her fixed look deterred him; he had wished to save appearances before the landlady, yet he feared what his wife's despair might embolden her to say or do. So with a nod of farewell, to which she made no answering sign, he took up his hat and left the house. The wind was rising rapidly, and the waves with it, and there was a noise in the air like muffled thunder.

"We shall have a roughish passage, sir," observed his companion. "When the well-hole begins to roar like that, it always means that mischief's brewing for us sailors."

The color, which rage had called up in Mr. William Blackburn's cheeks, and haste had kept there, deserted them at these words: What a menace would that noise have rung in his ears, had he carried out his late intention! and, even as it was, his guilty soul shook with terror. He could not now, as before, persuade himself that he had not meditated murder, for had he not been within a hairbreadth of confessing it to his proposed victim?

CHAPTER XV.

IN THE BOUDOIR.

IN the boudoir at Redcombe Manor—with which pleasant chambers there was a door of communication both with Mrs. Blackburn's room and that of her granddaughter—there are seated, this autumn morning, two fair girls. One of them is its mistress, Ellen Blackburn; the other is she who should have been its mistress, and for whom it was originally decked and furnished, Lucy Waller. They are both very soberly attired, and the latter is in slight mourning. Their tongues do not go so fast as those of two young people of their sex usually do. Each has apparently her own thoughts to occupy her, as well as her needle and thread. Just now there was total silence; but presently, as they happen to look up from their work at the same moment, with a little sigh, their eyes meet, and Ellen perceives that those of her companion have tears in them.

"Dearest Lucy," said she, "this is very naughty of you. Did you not promise me not to fret?"

"Yes, dear, I did. I strive to bear up all I can; I do indeed. But— Ah, you don't know!" She put up both her hands and cleared from her forehead wearily the masses of blue-black hair that hung over her gipsy face. It was curious that Lucy, who had been nurtured so tenderly, was of so hardy a type; while Ellen, whose bringing up had been of such as we have known it, was as fragile as a lily. "I wish I could do that sort of plain work, Ellen, that you are so quick about," observed the former. "When one knows one is doing some good, and being of some use, the mind, I suppose, may take some interest in the business of the fingers; but as to this stupid filigree-work of mine, which papa tells me is so much more lady-like—I might fold my hands and do nothing, so far as shutting out bad thoughts is concerned."

"And yet your papa is quite right, dear," returned Ellen, smiling. "It is certainly very vulgar to employ one's self with flannels and calico. Only, as for me, I can't do any thing else. I have no more idea of how to arrange those beautiful beads of yours than the butler. I had not the advantage of being brought up a lady, you know."

"You were born one, my dear, and therefore did not need it. I wish I had been born a poor girl, and then—and then—but no, I would rather it was as it is: 'Tis better to have loved and lost, than never to have loved at all.'"

"I think it must be so," said Ellen simply. "Even if I never was to see John again (which Heaven forbid), I should always thank God for having permitted me to know and love him."

"And, thinking so, it would seem to you wrong and wicked, would it not, even to dream of another lover?"

"Another lover, Lucy? How can you talk so? The very idea is quite shocking. Have I not solemnly promised to be his wife—or, at all events, no other man's?"

"But if he were dead, my dear?"

"That would be just the same. At least," said Ellen, interrupting herself hastily, "it seems so to me now, because he's alive. I don't like even to imagine such a dreadful thing as John's death. But still it is quite possible, surely, and by no means wrong, for a young girl whose first love has been snatched from her, on the threshold of life, to come in time to regard marriage with another man without disfavor. No one is bound to be the bride of the dead."

"Do you really think that, Ellen?"

"Yes, I do. I do not suppose she can ever give the second the same sort of love she had to offer to the first; but she can make him a good wife, and perhaps even herself a happy one."

Lucy looked around the little room with a sad gaze; then turned to the window, and watched in silence the soft autumn rain falling upon the croquet-ground without. Her feelings for so young a girl were not very delicately strung.

Her nature, like her form, was somewhat robust; she was a good horsewoman, and had been more fond of following the hounds than even her dead lover was; she had more than once "let off" a gun; it had even been remarked in the county at the time of her engagement, that she would make a better sportsman than her husband. But now, as she sat in the very room that her dear Dick had taken such pains to render attractive to her, and looked out upon the grounds where they had so often walked together, and on the fields where they had ridden, the recollection of the days that were no more became too strong for her, and her tears fell fast as the rain-drops without.

Presently, she turned round softly, and perceived that her companion was weeping also. It was not willingly that Lucy had suffered herself to be made friends with by Ellen Blackburn. Her own father's urgent request that she should not hold herself aloof from the new tenants of Redcombe Hall, would not have sufficed to bring about an intimacy, had it not been for Ellen herself. She had been so importunate, and yet so delicate in her affectionate sympathy, that, little by little, she had won poor forlorn Lucy's honest heart; so completely so, that the latter and her father were now guests in the very house of which a year ago she had been the expectant mistress; nor was there another heart, notwithstanding that this friendship was of as late growth, in which she reposed more confidence or felt more certain of meeting with tender reciprocity, than Ellen's. At times, indeed, she thought that these new Blackburns, aided by their ally Death, had ousted her lover from his home, would tinge with bitterness her feeling towards the innocent girl; and at times, the reflection, that Death had shown himself again this woman's friend, by sparing John while he took Richard, gave her a passing twinge of jealousy. But, on the whole, Lucy did Ellen justice in her heart and loved her, and, now that she saw her weeping with her, for friendship's sake and pity's, her soul was drawn towards her by grateful love.

She rose from her seat, and went up and kissed her tenderly. "Sister Ellen," she said, "your unselfish sorrow reminds me, by contrast, of my own selfishness. I had forgotten, until this moment, that I had some good news for you."

"What! about John?" exclaimed Ellen brightly. "I am sure it must be about John!"

"Yes, darling, it is; and may it never be your lot to be placed, as I am, out of the reach of such good news. I must tell you first that I found it in this letter of papa's this morning, which he gave me to read for quite another reason. Ever since—ever since last year, papa thought it would be 'good for me,' as he called it, to employ my mind, so I have filled the post of secretary to him, which my poor mother held, and know almost as much of his affairs as he does himself."

"How pleasant it must be to have a father's confidence," said Ellen.

"That depends, dear," returned Lucy, sighing. "It is *not* pleasant when almost every post brings tidings of disappointment and disaster. But there, that is between us two—I was wrong to say as much, even to you."

"But is not your papa rich? I understood he had very extensive commercial transactions. It is surely only a matter of how much gain! And what does it signify, if one has but enough to live on?"

"To live on and *pay one's debts*, my dear. That is also important."

"Oh dear, dear; I never dreamed of that!" exclaimed Ellen earnestly. "Can not grandpapa help you? He has plenty of money now, and I know he has a great respect for Mr. Waller."

"He has at present," observed Lucy cynically. "But since I have been a woman of business, my dear, I have learned what wins the respect of one man for another, and what loses it. No, my darling, you can not help us, thank you; although, if you were to breathe a word of this, you might injure us very much. There—I am growing selfish again. See, here is the good news I spoke of. It is only those half-dozen lines that will have any interest for you; the rest is all estimates and calculations about the Mosedale Reservoir. Papa is the chairman of the company, and they say that the great basin is insecure. In that case, it would cost a vast sum to repair it. The matter seemed very important, though this letter from the chief engineer has made papa more at ease. There is the place where he mentions Mr. Denton." Lucy pointed with her fingers to these words: "I do not attach the least importance to the 'crack wide enough to admit a penknife,' and from which no water issues. I have no doubt it arises from the inner part of the embankment, between the puddle-wall and the water, subsiding a little, owing to the water penetrating it, and thereby making the top of the embankment incline inward! It is certainly not worth your while to fetch me out of Wales to look at it; but to ease your mind, I will send a substitute, who will understand the matter as well as myself. I adjure you, like the man in the Scripture somewhere, not to despise him on account of his youth, which is a fault that is sure to mend, and really Mr. John Denton seems to have no other fault. He is the cleverest—and what is of much more consequence—the most diligent young fellow with whom I am acquainted, and will make a mark in the world much bigger than the crack in your Mosedale Reservoir. I have known him but a few months—we are employed on the same line here—but I am proud to call him my friend."

"Oh, Lucy, how kind you are to let me see this. Mayn't I cut it out?"

"No; certainly not," answered Lucy laughing. "The idea of such a thing! Why, that letter has to be shown to the Board of Directors at the next meeting, and 'filed,' and all sorts of things. It will be so much the better for Mr.

John Denton, for papa says there's nothing like pushing one's name about everywhere. Mr. Flywheel is a first-rate man in his profession, and his praise will be a fine advertisement."

"And what a nice man he must be!" mused Ellen. "And what a good judge of character! He says John has no other fault but youth."

"And even that is not so much amiss," observed Lucy gravely, "when a cruel grandfather compels us to dwell asunder. Why, even in ten years' time, you will be quite a couple of chickens still, you two!"

"Ten years, Lucy! How coolly you talk of such a terrible thing."

"It is not a lifetime, darling," said the other sadly; "though I hope you will not have to wait so long. But, at all events, we must get your grandfather's consent to let you see him when he is with us, for he will certainly stay at our house when we return home."

"At your house, Lucy? Oh, how good of you!"

"Not at all, my dear. According to what Mr. Flywheel says—and I must add, that we have had a pretty good account of the young gentleman from another quarter" (here she nodded roguishly at her blushing friend)—"the obligation will be on our side. And besides, the chief-engineer (or his substitute) must, of course, be his chairman's guest; that's a mere matter of business."

"Alas! to think that he will be so near, and yet that I shall not see him," sighed Ellen. "My grandfather is very kind to me, as you have seen; but in this matter his heart is not to be touched. It was not so once; but money has made him hard."

"There are many things that have the same effect upon men's hearts, Ellen, as the petrifying spring at Curlew Hall has upon whatever is put under it. There is money, as you say, for one thing; and there is the want of money. And it is not only grandfathers who are thus afflicted, but fathers also."

"But surely your kind, genial papa would never behave to you so cruelly? He seems to have no will of his own, but only yours."

"Ah!" sighed Lucy in her turn, "you are a dear little simpleton! Let us talk of something else.—Have you found out what is the matter with dear Mrs. Blackburn? She seems more sad and absent than ever. I spoke to her twice this morning, and she never answered me. Do you think she can be well?"

"Yes; she is well enough in health, I believe. She tells me, too, that nothing has happened to distress her; but it is evident there is something wrong. Even your papa, who is such a favorite of hers, can not now win a smile from her."

"Yes," said Lucy bitterly; "papa always finds out the subject which is most pleasing to every body, and converses about it as if it were his own favorite topic. He talks to you about clever folks who, from a humble position, have raised themselves to eminence by their scientific talents; he talks to your grandfather about an-

cestry and the great advantage of blood (which, I have heard him privately remark, has no value except to make blood-puddings); and he talks to Mrs. Blackburn about her 'Willy.'

Ellen had it on the tip of her tongue to reprove Lucy for this cynical talk concerning her father, and to remark what a desirable and unselfish possession this gift of interesting one's self in other people's views must be, and how popular Mr. Waller justly was in consequence; but that last remark of her companion's put all these ideas to flight. The subject of "Willy" had never been broached between the girls before. It was distasteful to Ellen on its own account; and besides, her grandfather had strictly enjoined upon her not to speak of it, unless when silence might be even worse policy than speech. This unexpected stirring of the skeleton in the cupboard sent a cold chill through her, for she felt at once that her companion had a meaning in it. Lucy was far too clever a girl not to know that the topic of "Willy" was an unwelcome one, and too much of a gentlewoman to give gratuitous embarrassment, and far less pain.

Ellen did not speak, trusting that her silence might be a sufficient shield; but this was not to be. The first shaft had not been shot at a venture, and the second came home direct.

"Who is this Willy, my darling?"

"Willy? Why, he is my uncle William; my grandfather's eldest son."

"I know that much, of course; and I know besides that he is his mother's pet. But why does she never speak of him, as other mothers do of their favorite sons; and why does his father never mention him at all?—I do not ask this from mere impertinent curiosity, Ellen; I hope you know me better than to suppose that. But yet, if there is any valid reason why you should be silent—any family secret, for instance, which you ought to keep, consider my question as unasked. One has no right to demand a confidence, and least of all if it compromises others."

"Nay, indeed," answered Nelly hastily; "there is nobody to compromise in the matter. I never speak of Uncle William, because—because my grandfather has forbidden me to do so. They are unfortunately not on good terms."

"And on which side lies the fault?"

"Well, on both sides, for I think my grandfather should be more forgiving. Uncle William committed a great error. He acted very, very ill, no doubt; but he has been punished for it."

"It seems so odd," mused Lucy, "that your grandfather should have been at Redcombe a whole year, and yet that nobody should have seen his eldest son. You have no idea how people talk about it."

"Indeed," said Ellen. "Well, they will see him soon, for he is coming home next month. He has been absent from home these five years."

"Abroad?"

"Yes; out of England."

"What is he like, Ellen? I mean, to look at."

"Well, some people think him handsome. I confess I do not. He is of middle age, tall, and powerfully built. His features are not bad, but their expression is a little harsh. He is somewhat willful, I fear; but there are many allowances to be made for him."

"Ah, I see," said Lucy gloomily. "I dare say, in his youth, he was a good deal spoiled by his mother."

"Perhaps so, dear; although, of course, I can not speak to that, he being so much older. —The weather seems brightening, Lucy; what say you to a walk across the moor?"

Ellen spoke not only with distinctness, but with a certain incisiveness as well, as though she would have got quit of the subject. Yet once more her companion returned to the attack.

"I can not say you have painted your uncle very pleasingly; but ugliness, like beauty, is happily often but skin-deep. Doubtless this 'Willy,' upon whom his mother dotes so, has a kind and tender heart."

"He has at least an impressionable one," observed Ellen evasively, "since he fell in love, and married young."

"Married!" exclaimed Lucy, laying down her bead-work upon her knees. "You astonish me! How long, then, has he been a widower?"

"He is not a widower at all, my dear; his wife is alive."

Lucy Waller drew a long breath. "I am tired of this telling of beads," said she. "You were proposing a walk; let us take one, by all means, while the fine weather lasts, even if we can not get so far as the moor. How pleasant is the sunshine after rain!"

Ellen had never seen her friend in such good spirits; and coming with such suddenness as they did upon depression deeper than usual, she could not help noting how applicable Lucy's last remark was to herself as well as the weather. The cloud that had settled on the young girl's life, for once was lifted high, and how pleasant was her smile after those tears!

CHAPTER XVI.

AT THE RESERVOIR.

REDMOOR is the vast plateau of heathery waste underneath whose southern promontory nestle Redcombe Village and Manor. A health-giving and glorious spot at all times—for even in winter the fir-woods (thanks to old Walter Stanhope of Curlew Hall) on north and east enable one to stand and admire the wide prospect in comparative shelter—but in summer-time the moor is rare and beautiful indeed. The soft, strong air that is almost always abroad upon it, is then laden with the scent of the fir, and sweeps over a prairie of purple and (where the gorse

grows) of gold. The highway, along which we accompanied Anthony Blackburn on his return to his old home, divides this gorgeous table-land in twain; but now that the coaches are off the road, and all the world is drawn to and from Mosedale by the steam-horse, it has become but a local track, and there are but few passengers. When the two girls had reached the top of the winding hill that led up from the village, and could command the whole expanse of the moor, there was not a moving speck upon this road to be seen. In the extreme distance rose the circular embankment, that ought by rights, in order to have harmonized with the general tone of the landscape, to have been a Roman encampment, but which we have seen to attract old Anthony's notice as an erection of quite a modern date. On the east lay the vast plantation in the centre of which stood Curlew Hall; but from their present stand-point the house could not be seen, nor, save for the faint smoke-wreath that hung over distant Mosedale, was there a sign of human habitation anywhere.

"Now that we *are* on the moor," said Lucy, "and the clouds seem to have cleared off for the day, why should we not get as far as the reservoir? He will not be there yet awhile, my dear; but still it will be an immense treat to you, I know, to visit the spot which will presently be gladdened by his presence."

"Of course I should like to get there," answered Ellen simply; "but I am afraid it will tire you to walk so far."

"Tire me!" echoed the other. "I like that notion. Do I look as if I was likely to be tired by any walk that you could take, miss? Why, you are a lily, a mere fragile, delicate lily; and I—I'm a tiger lily." Lucy laughed aloud as she said this. She was still in the same excellent spirits with which she started, and the fine fresh breath of the moor perhaps had added its sprightly influence. "See! now we have caught the turret above the Hall, and there's the flag flying! Why, Mr. Stanhope must be at home."

"I think not," returned Ellen, "or else my grandfather would have heard of it. He is much attached to Mr. Stanhope."

"So I have heard," said Lucy, looking askance at her friend, whose unconscious gaze was intently fixed upon the slowly rising mound. "Mr. Stanhope, too, on his part, it is said, is fond of riding over to Redcombe. It is seldom one sees so much friendship between men of such different ages."

"Yes, indeed," answered Ellen absently. "How far do you suppose it is from here?"

"To the lodge-gate, not a mile and a quarter; but to the house at least two miles. I don't think, however, we ought to call without a male escort."

"Call, my dear! call where? I am speaking of the reservoir."

"You may have been *thinking* of it, my dear, but we were talking of Mr. Stanhope and Curlew Hall. It is very ungrateful of you to take so little interest in so handsome and agreeable

a young gentleman, especially when he has so exerted himself to please you."

"He is certainly both good-looking and polite," returned Ellen gravely. "His nature, too, seems to me to have been an excellent one; but it has been sadly warped. How could it be otherwise, since his only calling has been the turf?"

"And what do you know, O most sober and severe of women, about the turf?" asked Lucy in some astonishment.

Ellen blushed scarlet, as she had reason to do. Lucy saw the blush, but mistook the reason. "Ah, that is dangerous," said she slyly, "to own that a young man has a fine nature, which has been warped; for the admission involves both respect and pity. Now, if I was to tell Mr. Denton, what mischief I might make! I hope he is not of a jealous disposition?"

"No, at least not very," added Ellen, for she thought of that day on Slogan—only a few months back, and yet, as it seemed, so long ago—when John had expressed something like jealousy of this very man. "But, indeed, I have never given him the slightest cause."

"That matters nothing, my dear; and besides, I am not quite so sure of you," said Lucy archly.—"What cavalier is this who comes riding through yonder gate at headlong speed? Who is it but Mr. Herbert Stanhope, of whom our grandfather is so enamored! Why, you Machiavellian creature, you must have known he would be here to-day, and invited me hither on purpose."

"Indeed, I did not; I knew nothing about it," answered Ellen, with ludicrous earnestness. "I hope he will not see us."

"That is very likely to happen, my dear, upon Redmoor; and particularly if you turn your face from him in that way. The ostriches do something of the same sort, and with the same result. Look! he has turned out of the high-road, and is already making for us! Alas for poor Mr. John Denton!"

It was a gallant figure—both man and horse—that came galloping gayly towards them over the purple moor; the rider's hat was doffed as he drew near, and he sprang from his saddle before he reached them, and led his steed by the rein.

"I am fortunate indeed," said he, "for if my proposed visit to Redcombe Manor had been at a more fashionable hour, I should have missed you both, it seems. I did not know that young ladies ever ventured out before luncheon."

"Your experience of them must have been limited; or else, and which is more probably the case, your acquaintance must be among very great ladies indeed," said Lucy laughing. She and Stanhope never met without some sharp passage of arms: but she gave the young man cordial greeting, nevertheless, and covered with her own easy manner the embarrassment of her companion, which would otherwise have been evident enough. "And to what are we dull Derbyshire folks indebted for Mr. Herbert Stanhope's unexpected return among us?" inquired Lucy, after due inquiries and salutations.

"With two such fair reasons before me," said Stanhope bowing, "I do not think that question need be answered. I came up, however, upon business—matters concerning 'my Curlew Hall estate,' as Moffat delights to call it, as though I had a dozen others, and this particular one was not mortgaged to as many people. I arrived from the south coast only last night."

"By the south coast, Mr. Stanhope means Goodwood race-course, Ellen," observed Lucy in explanation.

"Miss Waller is always right," said he, with a smile which caused him some effort to wring from his lips. "Except Mr. Moffat, she knows more about every one in the county and their affairs than any body. I sometimes think that she must lend money on mortgage herself."

"I should be a great deal more popular than I am if that were the case," returned she keenly. "Gentlemen would then be riding full gallop Mosedale-way instead of towards Redcombe."

This was a hard hit—what is technically called "a facer"—but Mr. Stanhope's good-humor appeared to be imperturbable. "Now, that is really very unfair," said he; "it is quite true that I was about to pay my respects at the Manor; but I was well aware that my old friends, the Wallers, were at present the guests of my new ones, the Blackburns, and I hoped to receive a welcome from both."

"Lucy seems to be most unnecessarily severe upon you, Mr. Stanhope, this morning," said Ellen kindly. "I am sure that Mr. Waller, as well as my own folks, will be delighted to see you."

"Now, I call *that* rather severe," observed Lucy sententially. "It is almost a hint that the gentleman is *de trop* with us."

"I am sure I never meant it to be so," said Ellen earnestly. "How can you be so rude, Lucy?—We are going to the reservoir, Mr. Stanhope, and if you can spare time, I am sure we shall be glad of your escort."

"You are most kind to say so, Miss Blackburn, and I only wish the reservoir was more distant."

"He wishes the reservoir farther!" cried Lucy; "and perhaps you too. But there, I forgot—Ellen does not understand slang. Her mind is so correct. She is not a sporting character, like you and me, Mr. Stanhope; she interests herself in practical science—engineering. That is why we are going to the reservoir. They say there is a crack in it large enough to admit a penknife: only think!"

"I am sometimes inclined to believe that there is a crack in Miss Waller's brain of about the same size," said Ellen, stung into sarcasm by her friend's merciless banter; and all three laughed aloud.

Lucy Waller and Herbert Stanhope had been friends from childhood; but even when in the nursery, their tastes being too similar perhaps for mutual agreement, they had sparred and quarrelled with one another. His jesting remark

respecting her knowledge of her neighbors' affairs was well founded, at all events as respected his own. She was well aware that Herbert Stanhope was very hard up, and she suspected that he was meditating an alliance with her friend for the sake of the fortune which every body knew she would one day inherit. These mercenary views were become just now, for a certain reason, particularly repugnant to Lucy, and hence the unaccustomed severity of a tongue which to men (with one single exception) had been always sarcastic.

Redmoor Reservoir, although it might not add to the picturesqueness of the spot where it was placed, was a fine work in its way. It was so large that it had almost the appearance of a lake, although by nature it had no such resemblance. It was formed by throwing an embankment across the gorge through which a moorland stream, ambitiously entitled the river Curlew, found its way into the deep Mosedale Valley. From the dam-head to the embankment, this sheet of water extended for more than a mile, and it was nearly half a mile across. It was deeper also (in some places eighty, and in others ninety feet) than most natural lakes. The embankment, which formed so striking an object upon the moor, and which could be seen for thirty miles from the valley, was a hundred feet in height, and five times as long and as thick. A mighty weir carried off the overflow, and so, in a somewhat contemptuous manner, the poor little Curlew was given back its own again, and hurried on complainingly down its own well-worn channel. Before this wrong had been done to it, it was scarcely possible to imagine a more charming spectacle, and even now it had great attractions. The gorge, indeed, down which it used to leap so gloriously was done for—dammed; the reservoir enveloped it wholly with its winding sheet. But hills rose on both sides to some elevation, and from them rivulets carried their tribute waves to the larger stream, through rocky and even wooded channels. To look from the embankment across this great artificial water, and on to Redmoor in its autumn hues, was a fair sight; but to gaze in the opposite direction, towards Mosedale, was to behold an extent of landscape such as few mountains of thrice the elevation have to show: the great and fertile valley, with its green pastures and yellow corn-fields, and the vast and growing city in its midst, to which they daily ministered, albeit it ungratefully did its best, with smoke and cinders, to mar their loveliness; though, on the other hand, at night, when these were clothed in darkness, it was Mosedale which in its turn shone and flickered with its hundreds of never-dying fires. Then, though you could not mark the lines of rail that spread on all sides from the hungry town, like threads about a spider's web, you could see distinctly the plump white puffs above the engines, and the long laden trains that labored out and in. Beyond the town the valley widened out, and tufts of wood that were fair copse, and swelling mounds which

were great hills, diversified its surface; and here and there the gilded vane of a church-steeple caught the sunlight, and here and there the sail of a river-boat. Indeed, it was the river which formed the chief and loveliest feature of the view; for, standing as it were by its very cradle, one could watch it, if not quite to its grave the sea, through childhood up to full-grown age: at first a narrow thread, but always deep, because confined within precipitous banks, with scarcely room between them and the flood for mills, or even cottages; and then a broad bright stream, that meekly bore the freights men put upon it; and then a thread again, that lost itself amidst the misty hills.

"What pretty farm is that upon the little island yonder?" inquired Ellen, to whom the scene was new.

"Curlew Farm, Miss Blackburn, at your service," answered Stanhope; then, as if in answer to a curving smile on Lucy's lips, he added: "to picnic at whenever you please. So much at least I can promise, its mortgages notwithstanding; although it is they, and not I, who would suffer in case this crack you speak of should widen, and the reservoir-burst."

"What a grand sight it would be," exclaimed Lucy, "if the thing were to happen!"

"You would not think so if you were at home at the time," said Stanhope: "Mosedale itself would not go scot-free, if this water-devil here was once to break loose. While as for the farm yonder, and the mill, and that cottage of yours, Miss Blackburn—"

"That cottage of mine," interrupted Ellen.

"Well, your grandfather's cottage, then: his brother Richard the fisherman built it, and a very charming little place it is. It is hidden from us because of the bend in the stream; but that would not save it, if this small Niagara were to thunder down any fine fishing morning. They say there are nine hundred millions of gallons in this lake here."

"How many pints is that, Mr. Stanhope?" inquired Lucy. "You seem wonderfully well up in the subject; and we are rather interested in the matter ourselves, are we not, Ellen?"

"I am certainly interested," returned Ellen quietly, and with a shade of discontent in her tone, "in the possible fate of grandpapa's cottage, as well as in that of Mr. Stanhope's farm. But I hope there may be no real danger. I am sure I see nothing of the crack they speak of."

"No, nor I," said Stanhope. "It is very likely only a dodge to get money out of the Company for a survey—a mere trick of some engineer. Those scientific gentry are not above a job."

"Oh, but indeed," observed Ellen hastily, "that is not the case at all in the present instance, for, as Lucy knows—" She hesitated, blushed, and stopped, while Lucy's laughter rang out merrily.

"I know nothing at all about it," cried she. "Don't appeal to me. All I have to remark

is, that it is now noon, and if the liability of scientific people to jobbery is to be discussed here, we shall not get home by one o'clock; and there's a beautiful grouse-pie for luncheon, for Mrs. Blackburn told me so herself."

As the three turned homeward, Ellen made the remark, that though they had seen so vast a prospect, it was singular that no human being had enlivened it.

"The reason is," replied Stanhope, "that about the dwelling-places on the Curlew there is absolutely no space for a man to show himself, out of his own house; while, where the stream grows wider, it is too distant to distinguish human objects; and as for the moor here, with the exception of you two adventurous young ladies, I have never seen any thing human upon it."

"Then there is a monster in human form, if at least it is not a man," observed Lucy, pointing to some stationary object on the road; "and if I am not mistaken, we shall presently see the caravan out of which he has escaped."

And indeed, while she was yet speaking, a one-horse conveyance emerged from the fir-woods behind which lay the steep winding hill, up which most persons preferred to walk by a short way that offered itself to foot-passengers, and to wait for their vehicle at the summit.

"It must be some one about to visit the Manor," remarked Stanhope, making a telescope of his fingers.

"Or else the reservoir," said Lucy, with a comical look at her friend.—"Has he a scientific appearance, Mr. Stanhope?"

"I don't know as to that," returned he; "but if I have the same long sight that I used to have, I make him out to be a very queer customer. If he is going to the Manor, I hope it is not to wait at lunch, for he has a most appetite-appealing countenance; but as for partaking of it, that is out of the question: I will bet ten to one he is no gentleman."

"That is a dangerous prediction," remarked Lucy. "Only suppose if he turns out to be a friend of Mr. Blackburn's or of my papa's after all! My papa knows some very queer people, I do assure you."

"Perhaps he is a friend of yours, Miss Lucy, for he is certainly coming this way, as if to speak to us;" and indeed, after a short conversation with the driver of his fly, the stranger left his vehicle in the road, and began to make his way across the moor, with the evident intention of intercepting them.

Mr. Stanhope and the young ladies all watched the coming stranger with some uneasiness, for which each had reasons of their own. The young squire dreaded lest this man should be the emissary of some Turf creditor, who, like Sir Arthur, might be desirous of making private terms with him, to which, however favorable, he would be unable to accede. Lucy Waller was not without apprehensions of a similar kind with respect to her embarrassed father; and Ellen Blackburn was filled with a vague terror, that was only too soon to take a tangible shape. She

knew at first glance that it was not John Denton; and before the new-comer had arrived within speaking distance, she recognized him not without a shudder.

"It is either a Ranter from Mosedale, who wishes to convert us," whispered Stanhope, as the burly form, in its ill-fitting suit of black clothes, and crowned with high-crowned hat, drew nigh, "or a begging-letter impostor with a petition."

"Hush!" said Ellen, in low and somewhat frightened tones; "it is my uncle William."

CHAPTER XVII.

A DISCONSOLATE WIDOWER.

THE moment was not altogether propitious for Mr. William Blackburn's introduction to the family circle; but even allowing for that circumstance, his voice and manner were not calculated to produce a favorable impression.

"Well, Miss Ellen," said he, taking his niece's hand with more roughness than affection, and looking suspiciously at Stanhope, "you don't seem over-glad to see me, nor over-ready to introduce me to your friends."

"You took me so by surprise, uncle; why, I did not even know you were in England.—This is Miss Lucy Waller, who is now staying with us at the Manor with her father: and this is Mr. Herbert Stanhope of Curlew Hall yonder.—How glad grandmother will be to see you!—How is dear Aunt Bess?"

"She is dead, Ellen." The would-be widower heaved a sigh and pointed to his hat-band. "She went to rest some weeks ago, poor thing!"

Without being an accomplished hypocrite, Mr. William Blackburn had that sort of power of dissimulation which suffices with our criminal classes to impose upon chaplains in jails; he could use the conventional phraseology of religion, and pull down the corners of his mouth.

"Uncle or no uncle, he is either a Ranter or a begging-letter impostor," thought Stanhope.

Ellen, greatly shocked by this unexpected news, was weeping behind her handkerchief. Lucy Waller, who had suddenly grown very pale, echoed mechanically: "Poor thing!"

The widower fixed his eyes upon her with what he intended to be a smile of gratitude: "You have a feeling heart, young lady, as well as a lovely face. Forgive me, but you remind me—Ellen, dear, does not Miss Waller remind you of her that's gone?"

It was with the utmost difficulty, and only by causing the horse which he was leading to violently jerk his bit and rein, that Stanhope could conceal a burst of merriment.

"How dreadful is this news! Oh, why, why did you not write and tell us?" cried Ellen, plunged in grief, and unconscious of her uncle's remark. "The last time we heard of her, she

wrote so hopefully, and seemed so happy in that—"

She was about to say "that island," when a frown from the widower stopped her. "The south of France did seem to agree with her at first," said he, "but it soon failed to do her good. It is a sad story, and we will not talk about it now."

"Your uncle has been many years out of England, has he not, Ellen?" inquired Lucy, after a somewhat awkward pause, during which the new-comer glanced askance at both his niece's friends—at the man, with jealousy; at the girl, with furtive admiration.

"Yes, for just five years.—Have you not, uncle?"

"Upon my life, I can not tell whether it is five or six."

"The *dolce far niente* of the sunny south makes time pass so imperceptibly away, does it not?" remarked Stanhope.

There was no touch of banter in the tone, and of course Mr. William Blackburn could not judge how uncharacteristic was this platitude of him who uttered it; yet he looked up with quick suspicion ere he answered: "Well, I don't know as to that; it was dull enough."

"Then, for your part, you like England better than the Continent?" said Lucy.

"Just so, miss; and English ladies better than all foreign ones. Why—not that I am one to flatter, but I have not seen a face like yours, which does one such good to look at, for these last twelve months."

"I thought you said the late Mrs. William Blackburn was so very like Miss Waller," observed Stanhope dryly.

"And if I did, sir," answered the widower angrily, "I am not aware that I addressed myself to you. But since you have done me the favor to listen to me so attentively, you may also remember that I expressed the wish that the conversation should not again revert to so distressing a subject."

"I am sure, Uncle William," interposed Ellen, "that Mr. Herbert Stanhope is the last man intentionally to wound another's feelings: he is a great favorite of your father's, who, I am sure, would wish you to be good friends with one another."

"Who wants to be any thing but good friends?" inquired Mr. Blackburn with surly irritation.

"All I object to is the being taken up so short in every word one says."

"I am exceedingly sorry to have taken you up short," observed Stanhope gravely. "It was only that I was so interested in that fortuitous likeness between the ladies, of which, however, I will take care to speak no further."

"Is this fellow staying at our house along with this girl?" inquired Uncle William in a hasty whisper of his niece.

"No: he only joined us on the moor," answered she in the same low tone. "Pray, do not be uncivil to him, uncle."

"Uncivil, begged! Do you suppose, you

stuck-up little fool, that I don't know how to behave myself like a gentleman? I will let him know, though he does seem so sure of having you upon his side, that he must also win my good word if he is to continue to be welcome at Redcombe.—Mr. Stanhope," continued he, raising his voice to a tone that he flattered himself was dignified, "my niece has been telling me that you have been so good as to form the escort of these young ladies; it is no longer necessary, however, to trouble you further, since I am about to accompany them home."

"You overrate the trouble, my good sir," rejoined Stanhope coolly; "and you are unaware of the promised recompense. I am now going to Redcombe Manor to eat grouse-pie; since, as I presume, Miss Blackburn, you have not rescinded your invitation on account of your uncle's arrival. There will be enough for him and me also, will there not?"

"Yes, indeed there will," said Ellen earnestly. "Uncle William, who has been so long away from us, does not understand, Mr. Stanhope, that you are not a chance acquaintance, but a friend and neighbor of ours, whom his father and mother are always pleased to see."

"Yes, yes, sir; it's all right," said Blackburn, who had seen a look of disgust steal over Lucy's features, which he was conscious of having caused. "I am not one to refuse to own when I am in the wrong, and far less to bear malice. Let me shake your hand, sir. You were speaking of grouse-pie—are there ever any grouse upon this moor?"

Full of his amicable purpose, Mr. Blackburn crossed over to Stanhope, who was walking on the other side of his horse, so that the animal now intervened between the two men and the young ladies. "I am sometimes short-tempered, Mr. Stanhope, but always devilish sorry for it afterwards. Let by-gones be by-gones. We will presently drink a glass of brandy together, to our future friendship. It seems to me that there is some likelihood of our being not only friends, but relatives, eh?" And into his new friend's white waistcoat he playfully dug a dirty thumb-nail, to enhance the keenness of his remark.

For perhaps the second time in his whole life, Herbert Stanhope blushed: he was not without scruples (as we have seen) concerning the part which he had set himself to play; and to have been detected in it thus early by so gross an observer was humiliating indeed. His right hand closed upon the rein he held with quick and strong clutch, and for one single instant Mr. William Blackburn was in immediate peril of measuring his length upon Redmoor.

"You are very observant of human nature, sir," was, however, his smiling reply. "We poor English folks are no match for you who have seen so many men and cities."

"You are right there," answered the late inhabitant of Formosa; "nothing's like mixing with the world. Still, one can't know every thing all at once just by looking at people;

and— We've over-walked the ladies a bit, so that they are out of earshot—who is this Miss Lucy Waller, eh? I have not seen such a deuced nice-looking girl since—"

"Hush! Yes; I know: since you were a widower. Well, she's Miss Ellen Blackburn's companion. Teaches her all sorts of useful accomplishments, potichomanie, and to knit beads for purses—"

"The deuce she does! Why, I thought she was an heiress! How comes her father to be staying with my people, then? Is he a drawing-master, or what?"

"No, not exactly. They are both much respected in the country.—But, hush! She is coming up with us.—I must apologize for *Roland*, ladies; but he is not accustomed to walk in such fair company. He is too fast by half."

"Like master, like horse," observed Lucy, laughing.

"Do you like fast men, Miss Waller?" inquired Mr. Blackburn, stepping to her side.—She had already been far from favorably impressed with him, but there was something in his manner now that was unmistakably insolent. She did not, of course, understand that this was caused by the conclusion to which he had just been led, that she was in a dependant and subordinate position; but she noticed a marked change in the style of his address, and shrank from it.—"You pretty girls always do like rakes," he went on in a confidential tone, that was in itself, under the circumstances, an impertinence; and he stuck his heavily craped hat upon one side, and thrust a careless hand into his pocket, to convey the idea that he also could be a rake, should love demand so great a sacrifice of personal character. In justice to Mr. William Blackburn, we must remember that he had not, in reality, to bewail the recent demise of an attached consort, and may be so far excused for his buoyant behavior; but to Lucy Waller, who, of course, credited his tale of woe, this sudden philandering on the part of the mourner—as unexpected as the curvetings of a hearse-horse—was inexpressibly repugnant, and her countenance did not fail to show it.

"Ah, you are cross with me now, I see," observed Mr. William, whose good opinion of himself and his personal attractions was certainly not inferior to their merit: "but I think you would be kinder, if it were not for these other folks being by. We shall be better friends in a day or two, when we come to understand one another, I feel sure.—Now, how do you get on with the governor?"

"Sir? I have not the least idea to whom or what you refer."

"Oh, I say!—come, that's being a little too innocent. Why, I mean your emp—that is to say, my father of course. How does the old hunk treat you? You need never fear my telling him, for he and I have never hit it off together; indeed, I went abroad entirely to get out of his way. And just fancy; until three days ago, I never knew that that young interloper, Rich-

ard Blackburn, had popped off the hooks, and so let me into my rights at last!—I suppose, by the way, that is the Manor-house lying yonder?"

Lucy could not have spoken to save her life; her countenance, if he had looked at it, must (notwithstanding even his gross self-esteem) have shown him contemptuous abhorrence—loathing; but, wrapt in the sight of his newly-acquired property, he took heed of nothing else.

"A very tidy place, upon my life," said he approvingly. "I dare say you find it snug enough yourself, even in your position. Then, think what it must be to be master there; and I shall be master soon, you know, for it's quite impossible the old cock can keep upon the twig much longer; as for the hen-bird, I had just as soon she staid on as not—she's devoted to me, she is. And if I choose to say I will marry this or that girl, no matter who she was or how poor, she would never gainsay me; she always knew better than to oppose herself to any thing I wished—I will say that for the old woman."

"Are you speaking of your mother, sir?" inquired Lucy, her face as pale as a corpse, her eyes staring at the house that was once to have been her home.

"Of course I am—of old Mother Blackburn, as I have no doubt you call her, when you and your father get alone together. That's quite natural—nobody cares for old people; whereas, with young ones, at least young girls, it's altogether different, especially when they are pretty ones, like you." He cast from his wolf-eyes a glance intended to be sheepish, and she met it without shrinking; he smiled towards her, and she stood her ground. "Now, look at that *other* couple," he continued, motioning towards the pair in front, who, deep in talk, were walking slowly on, unconscious that their companions had halted: "she is not half such a fine girl as somebody I have seen to-day; and, indeed, in my opinion, is a sickly little fool, without a pennyworth of spirit, although, I dare say, she takes it out of *you*, Miss Lucy; and yet, only look how he cottons to her! Not that he has only eyes for her looks, I'll be sworn—he thinks she is going to be an heiress. But there's many a slip between the cup and the lip; and I dare say you won't be sorry to see it in her case. Young ladies, for all their kissing and hugging, are seldom very fond of one another, especially when one has the upper hand. But for the future, you have got me upon your side—remember that:

"Oh, fair Lucy Neal,
Oh, sweet Lucy Neal,
And since you've got me by your side,
How happy you should feel."

And Mr. William Blackburn accompanied this skillful adaptation of a popular melody with the nearest approach to a tender glance which he could compass—an unmistakable leer. Some young women would have fainted on the spot, or gone into hysterics; others would have smacked his face. But Miss Lucy Waller only looked at him with much the same sort of shuddering curiosity that belongs to folks who visit the

Reptile House in the Zoological Gardens for the first time. He was repugnant to her, of course, but she had her reasons for being well pleased to see each cruel coil and deadly fang exhibit themselves so openly.

"We had better walk on, sir," said she; "I hear some one coming."

And even while she spoke there issued from a by-lane into the road immediately before them, a handsome red-faced old gentleman, well and gayly dressed, but with his hands clasped behind him, and his eyes fixed upon the ground. He came on, deep in thought, without noticing that he was not alone, until he almost touched the pair, then looked up with astonishment and annoyance. "Hullo, how came you here, and who is this—person, Lucy?"

"This is Mr. William Blackburn, papa," said she in distinct tones. "We met him, Ellen and I, upon the moor; he has, it seems, returned home somewhat suddenly."

"How strange—how very strange!" exclaimed the old gentleman cheerily as he held out his ample palm. "What an unexpected pleasure you will afford down yonder, sir; your dear mother can scarcely speak of any one else!"

"And yet she can't have had much to say upon that subject, neither," answered the other gruffly, "since she has not written to me for a twelve-month."

"Is it so long indeed? But you have been abroad, I hear; and when one shifts from place to place upon the continent, roving, as I do not doubt was your case, from one spot to another in search of beauty or of pleasure, the postal delivery becomes exceedingly uncertain."

"Just so," assented Mr. Blackburn dryly. "You talk like a book; like one of those conversation-books as folks take abroad with them—all question and no answer. But I am not going to be pumped by any body—so, there."

"I am afraid you are a little too deep for us country folks to fathom, even if we were inclined to be inquisitive," returned the old gentleman, smiling good-naturedly, and stroking his double chin.

"That's just what the other one—him they call Stanhope—said, so I suppose it's right," replied Mr. William, with an air of vulgar triumph. "I'm equal to hold my own in the world, I dare say, with most folks."

"What sagacity can do, I do not doubt you have effected," observed Mr. Waller; "but fate is sometimes too strong even for the most able. You seem to have been in trouble yourself lately."

"In trouble!" cried the other, turning pale and speaking very passionately. "What the deuce do you mean by that, sir?"

"Nay, sir; I meant no offense: I only feared, from the crape about your hat, that you had suffered some bereavement," explained the old gentleman smoothly.

"Oh, ah! just so. I have. I forgot that I was sailing, as it were, under—what do you call it?—the black flag. Yes, sir—a sad loss. I

was telling your daughter about it as we came along. My poor Bess has been taken from me these many weeks."

"Receive, sir, my respectful sympathy," responded the old gentleman, wondering within himself who Bess could be, and whether it was possible that this remarkable creature was in mourning for some favorite mare. "All pleasure has its alloy, and you could scarcely hope that this long-looked-for return to Redcombe Manor, your introduction to wealth and station, should be altogether without its drawback. Permit me, sir, to be the first to congratulate you upon this day and its prospects. I esteem it great good-fortune to be at the Manor on so auspicious an occasion."

"This *certainly* must be the drawing-master, or some poor devil of that sort," mused Mr. William Blackburn, "or why should he be so confoundedly polite? I am not quite sure whether he's not taking a liberty in speaking to me at all. But for his daughter's sake I'll let him go on. He must have a deuce of a salary to afford to rig himself out like that; the idea of his having a frilled shirt; why, he's better dressed than I am! Such a gift of the gab too as the beggar has!—'A great good-fortune,' and 'this auspicious occasion,' indeed—why, he'd talk a dog's hind leg off. Upon the whole, however, I am glad to have met him, for he'll make that first coming across the governor easy—the idea of which I don't much relish—I dare say he will be like a bear with a sore head, because I have come back without his leave, as though his only son and heir were to stay any longer upon that blessed island, while he has been in clover here, guzzling and swilling of the best, I'll warrant, for the last twelve months. But now I *have* come, I'll make up for lost time, or else my name's not William Roberts—I mean Blackburn."

"I see Ellen and Mr. Stanhope waiting for us at the garden-gate, papa," said Lucy coldly; "had we not better join them?"

"Why the deuce don't they go on, and let the governor know that I am coming?" observed Mr. William with irritation.

"I should think the driver of your fly, who should have arrived this half-hour, would have spread that news," said Lucy.

"Yes, but then he does not know it," answered the new-comer, biting his lips. "One can't be too cautious in a general way about one's self and one's affairs, and I told him I was only a visitor."

Father and daughter exchanged a rapid glance, the former of humorous amusement, the latter of keen contempt.

"If my humble services can be of the least use to you, Mr. William Blackburn," observed Mr. Waller, "pray command them. You are naturally desirous of sparing your parents such a sudden shock; they are neither of them young people, and joy may be almost as dangerous as sorrow when it befalls so unexpectedly. Shall I take upon myself to be your herald, and break

the tidings of your arrival to your father and mother?"

"The old woman is of no consequence whatever," answered Mr. William thoughtfully. "But, upon my life, if you would just step on ahead and tell the governor that I am here, I should feel really obliged to you. You see it was my mother who wrote, and not him, and I ought to have got the letter a year ago; and altogether it's deuced awkward."

"Your hesitation does you honor, sir. Some sons would have rushed into their father's presence without the precaution dictated by your thoughtfulness. I cheerfully undertake the task of envoy. In ten minutes I will answer for it you will be received with open arms, and without the embarrassment of a domestic scene."

And with that Mr. Waller nodded gayly, and trotted on ahead, with the confident air of a stout and sagacious poodle who has possessed himself of his master's walking-stick, and is carrying it home in his mouth.

CHAPTER XVIII.

DRAWING THE BADGER.

MR. BLACKBURN senior was in that snug little back apartment so popular with his deceased brethren, smoking a pipe, and sipping some light liquor, which might have been water, except for the suspicious circumstance that there was a spoon in the tumbler, when Mr. Waller broke in upon his privacy, all smiles. He was, however, a privileged visitor in that chamber, and had seen the squire partaking of that same refreshment at somewhat early hours before. It was singular enough that this old man, who, in his poverty, had been so scrupulously temperate, should in his days of prosperity—and especially in these later ones—have taken up with so reprehensible a habit; and the circumstance had set the wits of his astute friend to work to discover its cause. Why do men indulge in drink? he had inquired of himself. Because they have always done it, and like it; or because of some trouble, the thought of which they wish to drown. The first, from "information received," as the detectives say—and no detective was ever more keen in gleaning information that could possibly advantage him than Mr. Waller—was not, he knew, the case with his venerable friend and host. In the second, therefore, must lie the explanation. Now, what trouble could possibly affect a gentleman with four thousand a year in land and no debts? This was a question which, with all his astuteness, and indeed in consequence of it, Mr. Waller had found it very difficult to answer. At fifty years of age, his study of human nature (which had been unremitting), as a thriving man of business, as a jobbing member of Parliament, and as a speculator heavily dipped, had led him to the conclusion, that mankind were divided into two classes—Good and Bad; that is, into men whose names were

good for a bill, and those whose names were bad for a bill. The former were happy; the latter were always full of trouble. But Mr. Blackburn was certainly not in the second category, and yet he had taken to drinking gin-and-water before lunch.

Mr. Waller had not had the opportunity of discovering whether trouble had caused his hostess to adopt a similar remedial treatment; but Mrs. Blackburn also had evidently of late suffered under some mental distress, though that was of less significance, since women, he had observed, had the faculty of distressing themselves about matters very unimportant, because wholly disconnected with finance; moreover, in her case, this worry of mind had only lasted a very few days, probably since her husband had thought fit to communicate to her the cause of his own annoyance.

This puzzle had baffled the ex-M. P. (he had lost his seat for Mosedale at the last election through certain injurious commercial reports concerning him which had crept into those rascally newspapers); but now that he had seen M. Blackburn junior, he had a shrewd suspicion that he had hit upon the solution of it, or at least upon the right scent of the solution. Not only, thought he, has the Squire quarrelled with his son, but there has been some good ground for quarrel; that sulky cub must at one time or another, have thoroughly disgraced himself, which explains also Mrs. B.'s dotting fondness for him (since the moral cripple, like the physical, is always the mother's favorite child), as well as her enforced reticence upon that darling theme.

Altogether, Mr. Waller congratulated himself exceedingly that he had taken that charming autumn walk along Violet Lane, the better to reflect, in solitude and leisure, over the affairs of a certain Insurance Company in which he was a director, and concerning which, in that morning's paper, there had appeared a disagreeable advertisement, calling upon the shareholders and policy-holders "to communicate with the undersigned with respect to taking measures for mutual protection." He was accustomed to fish in troubled waters, and the motion of the craft (however crazy) in which he happened to be embarked rarely seriously inconvenienced him; if it should even have gone to the bottom, his natural buoyancy was such that he would perhaps have felt little personal fear; but, at all events, if anywhere in the cloudy atmosphere that had long environed him a gleam of sunshine showed itself it was always sufficient to put him in spirits; and such a gleam had, in his opinion, appeared to-day in the return of this prodigal son. As for the company he might have been keeping, or the sort of husks which might have formed his meals, during his exile, that mattered but little to Mr. Waller. Had he not already established amicable, nay, confidential relations with this young man? and (what was better) had not his daughter apparently done so likewise? He had talked with Lucy more than once

of this unseen mysterious scion of the House of Blackburn, and especially upon that very morning—which had brought such news of coming storm as had made him more than ever look out for harbor—had he dropped a hint or two, which she had certainly understood, if they had not met with favor, of the desirability of her cultivating this gentleman's good graces. Mr. Waller was ignorant of Mr. William's being a married man; he loved his daughter as much as, or, at all events, next to himself; and of course—or else what was the use of experience?—he knew better than she possibly could know what was best for her. He would doubtless have been pleased to find Mr. William Blackburn with somewhat higher traces of civilization; but still, argued he with himself, it is astonishing what improvements can be effected in a man, however dull and brusque, by a clever wife; and how much better such marriages often turn out in the end than those of mere sentiment.

"Glad to see you, Waller," said the old Squire cheerily, in reply to that gentleman's apology for his intrusion. "It is no use my asking you to take a glass, I know (though it's the wholesomest thing in the world, in my opinion); but you will smoke a small cigar before luncheon?"

"Just a whiff or two, thank you," returned Mr. Waller (who entertained, and justly, the very highest opinion of the virtues of tobacco for soothing and smoothing); "but I did not come to sponge upon your cigar-box, I do assure you. I have got some news for you."

"Then I am sure it's good news, or you would not be the man to bring it," said Mr. Blackburn smiling. "I have a very small experience, to be sure, in the matter, but you seem to me, for one of the calculating sort, to take such cheerful views of every thing. Now, there's Moffat, who is as great a schemer as yourself, he is full of complaints and difficulties; but you, you are the pink of a business man."

"Let us say the rose color," rejoined Mr. Waller laughing, "for I own I like to look on the bright side of things; and when they turn one badly, I forget it, and start afresh. The two best rules in life are these: 'What's done can't be undone,' and, 'It's no use crying after spilt milk.'"

"Then it's not good news, after all," returned the old man—"eh?"

"Yes, it is; or at least it ought to be. I have just come upon Miss Ellen and my daughter in the road leading out of Violet Lane, and who do you think they had with them? They're bringing him home to lunch, only I've got the start of them. Now, guess."

"I know," replied the old man placidly; "and I am not at all surprised. And you're quite right, in my opinion, in calling his return good news; for with all his faults, I like the young fellow uncommonly, and am always glad to welcome him to Redcombe. It's Herbert of course?"

"Well, Stanhope is with them, as it happens;

but there's somebody else also,—somebody that has better right here than even a friend and neighbor—somebody that you have not seen for—Good heavens! what is the matter, Blackburn?" The old man had dashed his pipe on the ground, and started to his feet.

"You don't mean to say that scoundrel of a son of mine has dared to come back, and without my leave?"

"My dear friend, pray, calm yourself. Mr. William Blackburn has indeed come back, and very hearty and well he is looking; as fine a young fellow as you would wish to see. But, as I understood him to say, he had returned home in consequence of a letter from his mother, which has been unaccountably delayed transmission."

"I will soon see whether he is lying or not," observed the Squire, ringing the bell with violence. "I have had reason, and good reason, to be much dissatisfied with my son, sir; and if he has not been invited hither—and I believe he has not—I will not see his face, nor shall he set foot within my house.—Mottle, tell your mistress that I wish to see her here—at once—immediately."

"My dear Blackburn," said Mr. Waller soothingly, as soon as they were left alone, "let me adjure you, as a man of the world, not to give way so to passion before a servant. They exaggerate any family disturbance so abominably. And, pray, do nothing rash as respects your son. He is here now, with or without leave, and there's an end on't: the least said is the soonest mended."

"If that fellow whom I have forbidden my house, has returned to it of his own head, sir, he goes back again whence he came, though he were ten times my son. And if my wife, contrary to my express injunction, has written to him before the term which—which—I assigned as the just limit of his chastisement—But here is my wife!"

"Shall I leave the room, Blackburn?" asked Mr. Waller, hesitatingly, and looking from the stern face of the Squire to the pale and frightened countenance of his hostess; "or shall I stay here, as the warm friend of both of you, and one who has your common interest at heart?"

"I shall be obliged by your remaining here, Waller," answered the old man, who, although looking the picture of implacability, had now regained the control of his feelings, and was sorry for having lost it. "I have been hitherto silent about this subject, because it was an unpleasant one; but since it has thus forced itself upon your notice, there is no reason for further reticence,—I have sent for you, Mrs. Blackburn, to ask whether, in despite of my particular commandment, you have invited William hither?"

"Oh Anthony, pray, forgive me," cried she passionately. "Oh, I knew this would happen!—Ask him to forgive me, Mr. Waller! It was not my fault, but that letter which I wrote a year ago; he knows the one I mean; I missed it from my desk the other day.—I had been

looking at it, Anthony—only looking at the outside, and thinking how pleased our Willy would have been to get it—and I left it addressed and sealed upon the lid, and the maid found it there when I was out, and thinking it was meant for the post, she put it in the letter-box. I did not dare tell you, husband; but that is what has made me of late so wretched: the fear of your displeasure, not with myself, but with my poor boy."

"There! you see there is nobody in fault, Blackburn," exclaimed Mr. Waller triumphantly, "with the exception of some officious domestic. I have more than once had letters posted myself in that way by my servants, in compensation, I suppose, for their so often forgetting to post those that ought to have gone."

"I told you to burn that letter, woman," said the old Squire, with difficulty suppressing a groan.

"You did, Anthony, and so far I am in fault; but it was my only comfort to handle and look at it, and to think of the joy which it would give to Willy when it did reach his hands. You gave me permission to send it in a month hence, you know; what difference, then, can a few weeks make?—Oh, speak to Anthony, Mr. Waller, for you know so well what to say, and, alas, I can think of nothing except my boy!"

But the ex-M. P., more sagacious than his impassioned hostess, held up a finger for silence. The Squire was leaning thoughtfully upon the mantel-piece, stroking his long beard with a tremulous hand: and it seemed to his observant guest that he had grown grayer and older within the last quarter of an hour; the fire in his eyes had quite died out, though the shaggy brows were still knit above them.

"To come just now," ran his bitter thoughts, "upon the very day that that young man has returned here, unable any longer to resist dear Nelly's charms. How like his evil choice in every thing! Stanhope is proud, and will never brook his rudeness, even if he should see nothing worse in him, hear nothing worse of him. These dead brothers of mine, who treated their own flesh and blood so ill, had no such son as this to curse them, and why should I have? Three weeks hence, three days hence, and all might have been well. But he must needs come now by misadventure—it seems as though it was fated to be so—and Heaven only knows what ruin he may not bring with him. And yet to drive him from my door would be to excite suspicion of I know not what, something almost as bad, if that were possible, as the thing itself! It is no use crying after spilt milk, says my smooth-tongued friend yonder; and I must, it seems, perforce adopt his advice; but first to give him so much of my confidence as may put a stop to further inquiries."

"Mr. Waller," exclaimed the Squire frankly, "you and my wife have conquered, although I must confess I feel it difficult to submit; and since you have so kindly interested yourself in a matter that is so entirely a trouble of my own, it

is only right that you should know its exact nature."

Mrs. Blackburn started, and glanced imploringly towards her husband.

"Yes, Mary," continued he; "the truth must come out sooner or later: and through Mr. Waller's lips it will receive, I know, a more charitable interpretation than if told by any one else.—My son, sir, has displeased me in various ways, I may almost say from a mere child; and when he arrived at manhood he crowned his willfulness by an act, for which no subsequent good behavior—of which, however, I am bound to say he has shown no signs—could atone. Without asking my permission, he made—I do not say a disgraceful, but certainly, considering his possible expectations, a most unsatisfactory and unsuitable marriage."

Across Mr. Waller's face there flitted a momentary expression of disappointment—almost of despair; and for once the ready river of his speech refused to flow.

"And yet poor Bess has her good points," observed Mrs. Blackburn, intensely relieved at the limited extent of the Squire's disclosure, and good-naturedly disposed even towards the woman whose unlucky existence interposed between her son and the best match in the county.

"One moment, my dear friend," observed Mr. Waller with a serious air, as the Squire moved slowly towards the door. "Do I understand Mrs. Blackburn to say that the young lady—your daughter-in-law—was called, in the abbreviation of affection, Bess?"

"I believe so," said the Squire coldly.

"Yes, yes, she was," answered Mrs. Blackburn eagerly. "What of her? I love her dearly, for she is certainly most devoted to my Willy."

"Alas, madam, she has now reaped her reward for that"—Mr. Waller cast his eyes slowly upward, past the fishing-rods and the stuffed trout, to the smoke-stained ceiling of the little room, and added impressively—"up yonder."

"What! is dear Bess dead?" cried Mrs. Blackburn, shedding genuine tears. "How truly sorry I am for poor dear Willy!"

"She is dead, dear madam; and the happiness of your son at his return is sadly clouded by that circumstance."

"Humph!" said the Squire, who was thinking that he might have spared himself the revelation of at least one humiliating domestic circumstance, although it was a minor one. "And when did this happen?"

"To judge by his deep mourning, I should imagine but very recently," said Mr. Waller.—"You need not grieve, madam, for one who, from your description of her domestic virtues, is doubtless"—perhaps the stuffed trout had discomposed him upon the first occasion, for he now fixed his eyes upon the empty fire-place—"is doubtless in perfect security; while, on the other hand, since the innocent cause of your son's transgression has been thus removed, I do hope, my dear Blackburn, that you will forget his past, and hopefully regard his future."

This peroration, so often received with favor when used in his capacity of chairman of some Company whose shares were at a discount, or as director of some railway which had not as yet declared a dividend, did not have its usual success upon the present occasion; the audience he was addressing (if we may so term the Squire) had for once a less good opinion of the concern in question than he entertained himself. Mr. Blackburn did not even vouchsafe him a reply, but walked slowly out of the room, with trembling limbs but head erect, in the direction of the front door. Before he reached it, Mrs. Blackburn overtook him, trembling also, although from another cause, and clasped his hand.

"Anthony, dear Anthony," she whispered, "don't be hard upon him, now that he is in sorrow. This may have changed him altogether, for all we know, and he may live to be a comfort to us yet."

Through the open door was borne upon the summer wind a coarse low chuckle, and a voice upon the terrace muttered harshly: "Well, clever as he may be, miss, it seems to have taken him a deal of time to draw the badger."

Mr. William Blackburn was sitting upon the balustrade of the terrace, between two stone vases of red geraniums, swinging his legs, and tapping his teeth with the handle of his umbrella, as though applauding the humor of his last remark. If his attitude and bearing were not artistically graceful or in harmony with his surroundings, he looked tolerably at ease. Stanhope and the two young ladies were standing by him, and intrenched, as it were, in that position, he seemed to himself pretty secure against the paternal ire. The longer the enemy was held in parley, the better (notwithstanding his allusion to his tardiness) he augured of his ambassador's success, for it was plain that the latter had at least persuaded the Squire to listen to what he had to say in his principal's favor. The evident fear in which Ellen stood of him, and even the quiet scorn with which Lucy received his observations—for he translated that as cautious reserve in the presence of the others—had given him more and more of confidence; and, above all, he had refreshed himself since we last saw him with a pull at that flask which always lay in the side-pocket next his heart. And yet, when his father and mother appeared hand-in-hand at the front-door, so immediately following that *jeu d'esprit* about the badger that they could not have failed to hear it, Mr. William Blackburn looked a good deal embarrassed, and descended from his elevated position in a hurried and undignified manner.

His mother, however, with one cry of joy, ran forward and folded him in silence in her arms; and thus, as it were, in sanctuary, he remained for a decent interval rallying those native powers of impudence and assurance which the inopportune of the moment had put to flight.

"How are you, William?" said the Squire, holding out his hand. "We are sorry to see you in so sad a garb."

For an instant the idea flashed upon him, that the misfit of his clothes—which he had purchased at a ready-made shop as he hurried through London—formed the subject of the paternal remark, but fortunately his eye fell upon his black gloves, and he remembered that he was in mourning.

"Yes, indeed, sir," replied he—and it was curious how even his feigned sorrow took egotistic shape—"I have had a very sad time of it lately. Poor Bess has been gone these three weeks. I was so cut up, that I had not the heart to write about it."

"Poor dear boy!" ejaculated Mrs. Blackburn fondly. "What a trial it must have been! Was she ill long? I trust she did not suffer much?"

"Not much," returned the widower; "not so much as I did in seeing her suffer. I never left her night or day, as you may be sure. She sent her best love to you and Ellen; and her duty to you, father."

"We must do all we can to cheer you, Willy," said Mrs. Blackburn. "There is no need to mourn for so good a soul, as Mr. Waller here has just been telling us, except upon our own accounts in having lost her."

"Not lost but gone before," interposed that gentleman deferentially. He had followed his host and hostess to the scene of reconciliation, and now offered this neat quotation (which he had read on a tablet in the church during last Sunday's sermon) with the air of one who dispenses some comfortable liquid upon a silver tray. An embarrassing pause ensued; and Mr. Waller continued more cheerfully: "As I came through the hall, my dear madam, the servant was about to announce lunch, and I told him that I would save him that trouble.—You must be hungry, sir, with what your long journey and your walk across the moor."

"Well, I could pick a little, and that's a fact," observed Mr. William; "though it's long indeed," added he with some precipitation, "that I have had an appetite for any thing."

He was about to offer his arm to Lucy, but Mr. Waller nudged him so sharply towards Mrs. Blackburn, that he could not mistake the hint.

"Lean on me, mother," said he; "for though you are looking well enough, you are not so young as when I last saw you."

"I shall grow young now," returned she tenderly. "I have not felt so happy for fifty years as I do this day, Willy."

The rest of the party—Mr. Waller with his daughter, and Stanhope with Ellen—followed them into the house, with the exception of the Squire, who remained alone upon the terrace, pacing thoughtfully to and fro, and muttering to himself at intervals—like minute-guns over that dead hope which, though unowned, had after all perhaps held a place within his heart—some sentences such as these: "No change, nor chance of change;" "As bad and base as ever;" "Rotten to the core."

CHAPTER XIX.

AN EXCELLENT MEMORY.

THE sight of Redcombe Manor, with its park and grounds, when William Blackburn's greedy eyes first lit upon them from afar, had, as we saw, somewhat quelled his insolent spirit. The prize had seemed to him too great to lie within reach of his itching palm, just as at first a stake of unwonted magnitude appears to the gambler too great a stroke of fortune to befall him—an unlikely thing to win. But, as in the gambler's case, now that the first great obstacle—his father's opposition and disfavor—had been smoothed away with such apparent ease, his hopes rose all the higher for his late depression; all seemed to lie within his grasp. The evidences of the wealth about him—which would surely at no distant date be his—inflated him with vulgar pride. The absence of his father from the luncheon-table removed what little check might have been imposed upon his behavior; and with every glass, of wine he swallowed he grew more confident and coarse. With a shiver at the heart, Lucy Waller contrasted this boastful ruffian with him who had once sat in his place, and dispensed hospitality at that same table in so different a fashion. Ellen herself regarded her uncle with little less aversion. He had grown positively rude to Mr. Stanhope, and she felt genuinely grateful to the latter for the restraint which she well knew he was exercising upon himself for her sake and for that of her grandmother. His nature was fiery, and his wit keen enough to suggest such a retort as would have disconcerted even his half-drunken host, and covered him with shame; but he spared him. Mr. Waller, whose age might have fitly entitled him to reprove or at least repress, and who was very skillful in the management of men, kept an unusual silence, and even seemed, to judge by the gracious manner in which he received the new-comer's rough sallies, to encourage them. As for Mrs. Blackburn, it is probable she scarcely caught the meaning of much that dropped from her son's lips; it was enough for her to know that he was in good spirits, and she rejoiced accordingly.

When the somewhat protracted meal was over, Stanhope asked permission to ring for his horse to be brought round; and when this was done, and the animal appeared before the terrace, he took his leave. The Squire had departed elsewhere, and the young man could not well help treating his son as his *locum tenens*; so, when he had bidden farewell to the rest, he held out his hand to William.

"I will see you to the gates," returned the latter gruffly, taking no notice of this gesture; and he walked on in moody silence beside the horse and rider until they had turned the angle of the house, and were out of sight of the others. Then he stopped, and laid his hand upon the rein. "Look you here, Mr. Stanhope, or whatever your name is; I have something to say to you, once for all."

For the second time that day, Herbert Stanhope's fingers involuntarily tightened their hold of the handle of his riding-whip. "I never permit my bridle to be touched, sir," said he quietly; "that is also once for all."

William Blackburn's swarthy face turned ashen pale, and he let go his hold; but his voice slackened not one whit in its imperious tone as he rejoined: "Neither your horse nor you will be here again, I reckon, as you have been wont to be. I know you, sir, better than you think. Horses have done you much harm. You are not so rich, though you do live at Curlew Hall, but that a wife with money would be agreeable to you. Yes, yes. You have had nobody here until now to deal with but an old man already in his dotage, but henceforward it will be very different—do you understand? Then listen to this; I do not choose my niece to be married at present—nor to you at all."

"Indeed, sir," returned Stanhope coolly. "Have you any other commands to communicate?—your wish, as you may easily imagine, will always be my law."

His contemptuous smile, even more than his mocking words, stung the other to frenzy; but repartee was not his strong point.

"You are vastly clever, Mr. Stanhope, but you will find you have met your match—another sort of match than that you expected here."

"I am not clever, Mr. William Blackburn, but I have a most excellent memory. I may say, indeed, as is said of the royal family, that I never forget a face that I have once seen, and I have seen yours before to-day."

"Never you mind that," rejoined the other doggedly, but not without a change of color; "you will henceforth not see it very often, at least at Redcombe Manor."

"I am not so sure of that, my good friend," said Stanhope, taking out of his pocket a small book, and referring to it with much deliberation. "Let me see: yes, it was in the same year that *Donnybrook* won the Derby, when I was quite a lad, that I first saw you—at Chester."

"I never was at Chester in my life."

"That's strange; for if you never were, it was your twin-brother whom I saw brought up before the magistrates for horse-poisoning. You were bribed to nobble the *Khan* for the Chester Cup. I sat on the bench with my father, and remember the case perfectly well. You were in with Richardson and that lot, but they could only bring the thing home to you. Instead of using arsenic, you tried (not from motives of humanity, I'll be sworn) some corrosive sublimate, which you put in his oats, and so only sickened the horse. There was another charge against you for cutting the sinews of some horse that was entered for another race—but that fell through. But I well remember—for I was interested in the case, and watched it after you were committed for trial; you got five years—and they are not over yet, Mr. William Roberts!"

"It's a lie!" gasped the unhappy wretch through his white lips.

"That is—of course—what it occurs to a fellow—of your stamp—to say," observed the other, carefully lighting a cigar. "You have the misfortune to be not only a vile knave, but a gross fool. You don't even know when you are beat, you stupid cur!"

The relics of the other's Dutch courage oozed away to the last drops as he replied, with his evil face cast down and his heel denting the soft gravel savagely: "What, in the Fiend's name, is it you want of me?"

"There, now, that's common sense, my man, and the nearest approach to reason which I have yet seen in you. What do I want as the price of my silence?—for not saying what I know about William Blackburn, alias Roberts, the man that poisoned the horse at Chester? Well, of course, I shall want lots of things."

"Then, I'm damned if you shall have them!" exclaimed the ruffian passionately. "Do you suppose I'm going to put myself in your vise, to be screwed up as tight as you please, all my life long? No; do your worst. Supposing all you say is true (and I don't say it is—mind that), what harm can you do to me? Even, according to your own showing, if I *have* done any thing amiss, it's paid for—ain't it?"

"Well, not just yet: you had five years, you know, and they are not quite over; you must be out on ticket-of-leave, and are therefore still under the supervision of the police. You wince at that; but really you ought to feel obliged to the foolish clemency of the law, which permits a gentleman of your class and character to be at large a single day before the date of his discharge. You have not, perhaps, studied the discussion upon this matter in your late retirement, but I assure you that the papers have been full of it. How you must have greened the chaplain, and how easy he must have been to 'green!' However, you certainly have, as you were about to say, been punished, and may consider yourself a free man. The law has been avenged, but not society. We can't admit horse-poisoners into county circles, my good sir; we can't allow them to marry into county families, my excellent friend—that is to say, if the crime is known. On the other hand, so long as the secret is preserved, they may do almost any thing they please. Having brought the argument thus far, your sagacity is surely sufficient to permit of your drawing the deduction, that my silence must at any price be secured."

The force of contempt and bitterness could no farther go than in the young man's air and tone; but the fact was, that he not only despised the wretch before him, but also himself, for being under the necessity of making terms with such a creature. It is easy enough for a fool to be indignant with the vices to which he is not inclined, and to be blind to his own shortcomings; but Herbert Stanhope was no fool, and could not play the hypocrite with his own conscience. No one knew better than himself how vile was the part that he had undertaken to play in the house of his friend and neighbor; and the few words

that William Blackburn had remarked upon it had secretly stung him far more keenly than all his sarcasms had affected the other. He had been, from the nature of his pursuit, acquainted with many a scoundrel, and had often had a common interest with them; but he had hitherto contrived, in that respect, to keep his turf experiences and his own private life distinct and apart from one another. At that very moment, he was justly liable to disgrace and outlawry among a certain set of persons with whom he had chosen to cast in his lot. He did not spare himself at all in the view he took of that matter, but his ways outside the betting ring had been always those of a gentleman. For the first time, he now found himself, in what might be called his Home relations, about to become hand and glove with a villain. If William Blackburn's crime had not been one connected with the calling in which he had himself gone so far astray, he would not have been so bitter against him; but we are as fanciful in our moral as we are in our physical disease, and he loathed him because he appeared to mirror some distorted and odious image of himself. "Well, your answer, sir?" exclaimed he harshly, as the other continued his excavation in the gravel without a nod. "Or, shall I ride back and tell your father that I must decline the invitation he has given me to pass the next few days at the manor; since, though I am sorry to lose his friendship, I can not permit myself to share the same roof with a felon."

"No, no," said the other, with an affectation of frankness; "you can come if you like, of course. There is no need for us two to quarrel. You have only to hold your tongue, and you will have my good word with Ellen. The old man will cut up well, and there will be plenty for her as well as for me. I am sorry I was so rough with you—there, a gentleman can't say more than that. Henceforth, we'll work together; that's a bargain, and here's my hand upon it."

"There's no necessity for that," rejoined Stanhope coldly. "And perhaps it will be as well, since you showed such temper just now upon the terrace, that we should not appear in public on the best of terms with one another. You can grunt 'How do you do?' instead of shaking hands, I dare say. I shall be here to-morrow for a day or two. Good-bye." And with a careless nod, Stanhope slowly rode away along the avenue, without once turning his head. Had he done so, he would have seen his late companion still standing on the same spot, and watching him with wolfish eyes.

"If I only had him in the well-hole at Formosa," muttered he through his clenched teeth, "and could watch from above the rising tide, and see him climb, and cling, and slowly drown; or, better still, if he could scramble near the top, and think he should be saved, and come within my reach, so that I might make him lose his hold—then, and not till then, should he and I be quits."

CHAPTER XX.

THRUST AND PARRY.

As Stanhope passed through the lodge gate, he beheld, to his surprise, and not with pleasure—for he was by no means inclined just then for company—Mr. Waller standing on the turf by the roadside, and evidently waiting for him. He had come from the terrace by a shorter way than through the avenue, and would have intercepted him in any case; but not a little time had been taken up by the parley with William Blackburn, and the look with which the ex-M.P. received him was pregnant with curious inquiry. "What on earth have you been doing, Stanhope? I began to get quite alarmed, not indeed upon your account, but upon that of our friend in the black dittoes. Have you been horsewhipping that wretched cub, or what? He was certainly very rude to you."

"As to that, he was rude to every body; and upon my life, Waller—though, under the circumstances, it was not for me to interfere—if I had been a relative of any lady at table, I should have felt it my duty, at all hazards, to have put a stop to it."

"Well, the fact is, it was a deuced delicate business, my good fellow. In the first place, the man was drunk, and remonstrance is not only thrown away in such a case, but sometimes makes matters much worse. He might have got angry and 'said things,' you know, before the women; then, again, if there had been a row, his father must have heard of it, and it would have ruined the poor devil altogether. They're not the best of friends, you see, as it is, and one would not have liked to have widened the breach, would one? It is about this very matter that I want to have a few words with you. I think we should give a chance to this just returned prodigal. If he is a beggar on horseback, we ought not to let him ride to the deuce."

"Why not?" asked Stanhope coldly, looking hard in the other's face. "I have been riding in that direction myself these five years, and you have never attempted to stop me."

"But you have not ridden so fast as this man, my good sir," added Mr. Waller, smiling, "although I dare say you have outrun the constable. Besides, you are not the sort of man to take the advice of a neighbor, however well meaning it might be."

"Then you think that gentlemanly?"—and Stanhope pointed contemptuously over his shoulder with his whip—"is one more likely to listen to reason?"

"No; not exactly that: he would not be easily led; but I think he might be *driven*, that is if one knew, *as you do*, what sort of goad was efficacious."

"I know? How can I possibly know?"

"My dear Stanhope, why should you attempt to deceive me? If you have not been horsewhipping this fellow—which I confess I thought you had, by the expression of your face—you have certainly got the better of him in some way

or another. How does a man obtain a mastery over a fellow-creature wilder and more savage than himself?—By a stick. You have not employed a material one; you must therefore have used a moral one. Mr. William Blackburn is not a person to have been swayed by mere eloquence—for I have tried that with him myself—it is plain to me, therefore, that you have made him afraid of you. You are his Rarey—the tamer of this wild animal; and to become a Rarey, you must possess a secret.”

“My dear Mr. Waller,” returned Stanhope, with an amused air, “your logic is most admirable, and I am quite sorry to think that you have only a poor country gentleman like me to listen to it. I have never doubted your sagacity, nor has any body in these parts ever ventured to do so: at the same time, I have heard a whisper, now and then, which is not quite so favorable to your disinterestedness. May I inquire—in case, that is, you intend to ask me any more questions—how this matter can possibly affect you? Forgive me if I can not easily believe that the welfare of Mr. William Blackburn is your sole consideration.”

“My dear young friend,” said Mr. Waller blandly, “I am sorry that at your time of life you should be so suspicious; a circumstance, however, which (as foreign to the generosity of your character) I attribute to your connection with the turf. I can not help what evil tongues may say of me; though I am sorry their slanders have entered ears which I had hoped were friendly to me. I solemnly assure you I have no underhand motive in this affair whatsoever. I have no great interest in the young man, perhaps, although at the same time we should remember he has been severely tried.”

An irrepressible smile flitted across Stanhope’s face.

“Gad! perhaps he *has* been tried!” thought Mr. Waller.

“You and I,” continued the ex-M. P., “have had no experience of poverty, and of the temptations to which it is exposed. We were brought up tenderly, and taken care of until we could take care of ourselves. This man, upon the contrary, has had a hard life of it from the cradle. I am no humanity-monger, as you well know, but I think we should look with charity upon such cases. I give you my word of honor that I honestly believe there may be good in this rough fellow, that if he only has a fair chance he may still turn out a respectable member of society; and it is my fixed intention to do my best to make him so.”

“Upon my life, I begin to think Waller is in earnest,” thought the young man; “but then, he is such a very clever fellow.”

“And yet, my dear Stanhope, as I have confessed, my interest in this unhappy person is very small as compared with what I feel for his parents. They are both, as we know, kind and hospitable folks. Anthony Blackburn comes of as good a stock as yourself—one which we all respect—and his wife is in her way an excellent

creature. If this son of theirs goes to the dogs, his father will die of vexation (from the shame of it), and his mother of a broken heart: and again, let me ask you, by the way, is not the very circumstance of her devotion to him a proof that there is some good in the man? The Squire, it is true, has no such affection for him, but the main point is that the happiness of both of them is, for whatever reason, equally bound up in his future. His disgrace would destroy them, as well as do grievous harm to that charming young lady, their granddaughter. You must surely go with me thus far, my dear young friend?”

Stanhope nodded with a grave smile.

“Well, these excellent people have been good enough to repose some confidence in me.”

“Now he is going to put a little water in the pump,” mused the other, “in order that he may coax out of it whole bucketsful.”

“They have reposed no confidence in me,” observed Stanhope dryly.

“No; but you have obtained some information from the fountain-head: let us put our two sums together, and add them up. It fell to me, as you know, to break the news just now of this William Blackburn’s arrival to his father. He was terribly put out by it. I never saw a man more moved, that is, with anger. His behavior was such that he thought it right (in explanation of it) to acquaint me with the cause of his displeasure. It appears that this lady, who has so lately died, was a person whom Mr. Blackburn strongly disapproved of, as respected her position in life, and that his son married her contrary to the Squire’s wishes.”

“But now that she is dead, my good sir, I see no reason for a continuance of this ill feeling between father and son, and nevertheless it still exists.”

“What excellent sense you have, my dear Stanhope! It was only because I knew you to have so great a faculty of observation, that I made up my mind to tell you this much—which I should otherwise have certainly treated as a confidential communication. Stanhope will be sure, said I, to find out for himself that this marriage with ‘Bess’ was a *misalliance*. I can do no harm by the revelation; and with this fact to go upon, we may, as common friends of the family, take counsel for their benefit; and here we are laying our heads together accordingly. Now, since, besides this marriage, there must have been something else to make the old man so bitter against his only son, the question is: What was it?”

And the ex-M. P. smiled good-humoredly, and patted the mane of his friend’s horse, as though he would have elicited the views of that sagacious animal, as well as those of his rider, upon the matter in hand.

“You, of course, Stanhope, know all about it.”

The suddenness of the inquiry, accompanied by the rapid looking up of the speaker into the young man’s face, disconcerted him so, that if he had contemplated any deception, it would

have been put to flight; but he had entertained no such design.

"Yes I do," said he frankly; "at the same time, Mr. Waller, you must excuse me if I claim for myself the same privilege which you confess you would have exercised. You say you would have considered it a breach of confidence to tell me what you have just communicated, had it not been within my own power to guess it. Now, you, on your part, have *not* guessed what it is which has caused Mr. Blackburn and his son to be on such bad terms with one another; and notwithstanding my high opinion of your sagacity, I will add that I do not think it likely you *will* guess it. This is surely a sufficient reason for my silence: but besides, the matter in question was not revealed to me in tacit confidence only; I have passed my word to keep it as a secret. Under these circumstances, I need not, I am sure, say to Mr. Waller: 'Do not press me to break my word.'" And Stanhope gathered up the reins from his horse's neck.

"One moment, one single moment," exclaimed the ex-M. P., in accents which, though intended to be cheerful, could not quite disguise his chagrin. "You may be sure I shall not ask you to do wrong. But—only to relieve my mind—just tell me this," he looked furtively round and sunk his voice to a whisper: "I know this unfortunate man has been in sad straits, but—he never *stole* any thing, did he?"

"What a horrible idea!" ejaculated Stanhope. "He certainly did *not*. If such an assurance be any satisfaction to you, you are very welcome to it.—And now, good-day."

"Then it must have been poaching," whispered the other earnestly. "I am perfectly convinced that it was poach—"

But Stanhope touched his horse with his heel, and with a good-natured "No, no, Mr. Waller, that won't do," trotted away without another word.

"A very obstinate young man," murmured his discomfited inquirer; "and a secretive young man—which is a bad sign. I'll lay my life, however, it was poaching. How sharp the fellow took me up when I asked him, on the hill yonder, if he had not been 'in trouble' lately; and again, did I not see Stanhope smile when I talked of the man's having been 'severely tried.' I dare say he was punished severely. The game-laws are most oppressive, and a disgrace to the country, as I always intended to say in the House of Commons. I'll write a pamphlet against them, and give it to William Blackburn to read; then I shall easily find out the truth. Though it was certainly poaching. Upon my life, I am afraid he has been in jail. That's what comes of 'Justice's justice.' Poor fellow! Why, I know lots of people who poach habitually, but then they're rich men; which is very different. From what the Squire said, it was evidently quite an early peccadillo; I dare say merely a boyish folly, which it was cruel in the law to so chastise, and still more cruel in his father to resent so long and bitterly. Yes, yes; it was a mere frolic, I feel sure."

Mr. Waller's face wore its usual smile, as he re-entered the avenue, in the middle of which it, however, grew once more serious, as he stopped and muttered to himself: "By gad, I hope he did not kill a keeper, though!" Then, adding briskly: "Let us hope he only shot him in the legs," he hummed an air, not very correctly, from the last new opera, and hurried gayly on.

In the croquet-ground were Ellen and Lucy with their mallets; they were by no means pursuing the game with the usual ardor of young ladies, but rather made it serve as a cover to conversation. Here follows the substance of their talk since luncheon:

"Well, and what do you think of him, Ellen?"

"My dear Lucy, what a question! You know it is not the first time that I have seen him."

"That is scarcely an answer.—It is my green ball to play, is it not?—You must confess, at all events" (thud), "that he did his best to make himself agreeable."

Ellen sighed, and missed a hoop.

"You are thinking of something else, my dear, or you would not play so badly," remarked Lucy, holding up her finger reproachfully. "I shall think it my duty to tell Mr. Denton, I shall, indeed. Supposing even that meeting on the moor was accidental—"

"What *do* you mean, Lucy?—I thought you were speaking of my uncle."

"Indeed, I was not" (tight croquet, and ball sent to the confines of the grounds); "I am talking of Mr. Stanhope. You are aware, I suppose, that he was making love to you?"

"He certainly was not, my dear; I deny that there was even the appearance of it—but it so happens—in fact, he knows all about me and John."

"Ah!—You have one more ring to go through with that blue.—Then all I can say is, I don't understand it. You know, I suppose, that he has the reputation of being on the look-out for a fortune; and that his estate is much embarrassed?"

"I have heard that he is dissipated and extravagant."

"I don't know about dissipated, though he is doubtless extravagant. People are always apt to believe the worst."

"But I thought he spent all his time on race-courses."

"Did you?—Come, I've hit that green at last" (viciously). "Not all his time, surely, because there are times in the year when there are no races."

"I'm sure I don't wish to be hard upon him, Lucy; though I thought you were very severe with him on the moor, talking about his debts and his poverty."

"It was evident that you sympathized with him, my dear; and it is a sort of sympathy which is very dangerous. As to him, I saw at once that he had made up his mind to have your forty thousand pounds *down*—or whatever it is. He is come down here to get it, that's certain."

"My dear Lucy, how can you say such things? I have told you the truth; he is perfectly well aware of my engagement."

"And how came Mr. Herbert Stanhope to be 'perfectly aware' of such a delicate circumstance? But perhaps that is a secret?"

"No, indeed; he has been very intimate here—with papa more so than any other neighbor; and—they have been used to talk quite confidentially."

"Oh, I thought your grandpapa did not know that you were engaged."

"My dear Lucy, what is the matter with you? You know, as well as I do, that my heart is in John's safe keeping. But even supposing it were otherwise, nothing would ever induce me to marry any man whose pursuit was racing."

"Well, I never heard that Mr. Stanhope was a blackleg; although I have heard all sorts of malignant things about him. I have known him from my childhood, and he's not, I assure you, such a wretch as you seem to think him."

"A wretch! Lucy? Indeed I think nothing of the sort. But with respect to racing—it is a thing of which I confess I have a great horror."

"How wicked you must think me, then, my dear," laughed Lucy, "for I once made a little book on the Derby myself, stood to win eighteen pair of gloves (all with double buttons); and I don't think it very much demoralized me."

"It does some people," returned Ellen gravely.

Lucy took her green ball with infinite pains, and hitting fair (which was rather unusual with her), through three hoops before she spoke again:

"Is your uncle William fond of race-courses, Ellen?"

"I think so; at least he used to be so, long ago."

"Have you any reason to believe that he and Mr. Stanhope ever met before, Ellen?"

"None whatever. Why do you ask the question?"

"Because, at luncheon, I noticed Mr. Stanhope looking at your uncle more than once in a sort of puzzled manner, as though he were trying to recollect something about him. It may, however, have been only my fancy.—Is not that somebody calling 'Lucy?' Yes, it is papa's voice upon the terrace. Dear, dear! just as I was close to the post, and almost 'a Rover.' I dare say he wants me to write something for him before the post leaves; if not, I will be back directly, my dear."

And off she ran. She did not come back, and Ellen continued to knock the balls about and muse.

"What *could* have been the matter with Lucy, at first so testy and almost cross, and then again in such high good-humor? What must she think—what must every body think of Uncle William and his behavior? And yet it was not that which had put Lucy out, but something, as it would seem, in her own (Ellen's) conduct.

What had she done to annoy her? Did Lucy guess at what had already happened between Mr. Stanhope and herself? If so, Lucy must be aware that any attentions he might now pay her must be simply those of respectful friendship. If not, cognizant as she was of her engagement to John, that knowledge should have been sufficient to acquit Ellen in her friend's eyes of any charge of encouraging this man's addresses. But indeed, why should Lucy concern herself about the matter at all? and, above all, why behave so inconsistently with respect to Mr. Stanhope? She had abused him to his face in a manner that had been quite embarrassing to her (Ellen); and now she not only refused to hear a word against him, but even suggested imaginary attacks upon his character, for the mere pleasure of controverting them. Then, how she must have watched him at luncheon, to get that idea into her head about him and Uncle William having met before! Was it possible—But no; while playing in the very croquet-ground that had been laid out to please her by dead Richard Blackburn, and in a spot so pregnant with tender memories, it could surely *not* be possible, and yet it was very strange."

CHAPTER XXI

SNAKES IN THE CROQUET-GROUND.

IMAGINE the feelings of domestic circles resident in the Zoological Gardens upon an occasion of one of the Carnivora being let loose, by way of experiment, and permitted to perambulate the grounds like any biped visitors, and you have a very tolerable idea of the apprehensions excited in the Blackburn family by the advent of Mr. William. Perhaps we should even have put it stronger. Imagine the feelings of the aforesaid circles after nightfall! Philosophical persons interested in natural history (but dwelling at some distance from the Regent's Park) would in vain protest that there was no real danger—that long confinement and abstinence from old habits of rapine would render the creature harmless. The keepers and their families, who know him best, would have a very different opinion. Perhaps, however, his own particular keeper, though agreeing with his brethren in a general way, would make an exception in this case, just as any Englishman in the Indian army thought that *his* regiment—*his* sepoy—would be true and merciful, though every other became wild-cats. The parallel between Mr. W.B. and the loose beast in question would then be complete, since Mrs. Blackburn was such a keeper.

Mr. Waller, too, who, among other admirable qualities, enjoyed the faculty of persuading himself that every thing would turn out as he wanted it to do, had considerable confidence that by tender and yet judicious treatment this poor animal, so long accustomed to the jungle, and perhaps even to human flesh, might be reclaimed—nay, rendered docile, just as was the lion in the

poem, by some Una. Mr. Stanhope had no such expectation, but possessed that confidence in its good behavior (at all events towards himself) which is inspired by the possession of a pocket life-preserver heavily loaded. Lucy, for her part, regarded the creature with loathing rather than fear; but Ellen, who had more experience of its nature, feared both for herself and others, and yet could be hardly said to loathe. She had a kind and simple heart, which found it difficult, as all such do, to judge one so nearly allied to her by the same standard which she would have applied to a stranger; a weakness pardonable enough, and yet one which has more to answer for in the encouragement of offensive persons than any other human frailty.

As for Anthony Blackburn, this unlooked-for advent of his unchanged son had been a blow from which he had but just strength to rally, or perhaps even only to appear to rally. He was not one whit afraid of him, but he did not feel himself competent to cope with him alone. He was well pleased, therefore, to have Mr. Waller for his guest just now; and if it was not for the same reason that he had invited Mr. Stanhope to stay at the Manor-house, it was because for that he had a still stronger motive. A union between this young man and Ellen, to which he had always been favorable, had become now not only desirable in the Squire's eyes, but absolutely imperative. If Stanhope wanted money, as he had heard, then so much the better, since it would make him the more eager, and the less likely to regard impediments. And yet, what a monstrous one was this which had thus unexpectedly arisen, and was certain every day to exhibit some new objectionable feature! Even on this account, not a day was to be lost in throwing these young people together as much as possible; and besides, there was the danger of William's disgrace—the punishment as infamous as the crime—becoming known, and blasting all Ellen's future. Sooner or later that dread secret was almost sure to ooze out, even if this good-for-nothing should not some day, over his cups, himself proclaim his shame; and then how hopeless would it be for any slip of the House of Blackburn to take root in native soil, or be grafted on a neighbor tree!

If William Blackburn had begun his new life as he intended to go on with it, it was indeed a gloomy outlook. His interview with Stanhope had, it is true, counteracted the effect of the wine he had tossed off at luncheon; but that same afternoon he had taken a "drain" or two of a stronger liquor, and after dinner he had again drunk to excess. He did not join his father and Mr. Waller in the smoking-room, but staggered off to have a pipe by himself out of doors, to the great relief of perhaps both the seniors. His condition had been too obvious to be ignored even by the discreet ex-M. P., and he alluded to it in a philosophic and abstracted way between the whiffs of his cigar, as follows:

"It's a curious thing how any excitement of the mind is fed by wine, like flame by fuel.

How many persons would fall into the error of supposing your son William to be downright intoxicated, when, in reality, he is nothing of the sort!"

"I am glad to hear it," returned the Squire bitterly; "I thought myself that he was drunk."

"Not at all, my dear sir: do not distress yourself with any such idea. The sense of the novelty of his position, and the rich social promise of it, are quite sufficient, assisted by ever so little wine, to have thus exhilarated the young man."

"Young? He is two-and-forty at least," responded the other gloomily, "and old enough to know better." Disparagement of this mild character was very suitable to the state of the poor Squire's feelings, for it did slightly relieve his choler; and, moreover, it was likely to prevent his astute companion from picturing to himself any graver causes for annoyance in his son's conduct.

"Still, my dear Mr. Blackburn, the very ease with which Mr. William became excited is to a certain extent (although I am the last to defend excess) in his favor. In the first place, remember this is probably the first occasion on which, since his recent bereavement, he has permitted himself any enjoyment at all; and I dare say some sorrowful feelings would perforce intrude upon him, which he endeavored by a few glasses of wine to dissipate. A more heartless man would have taken matters more coolly—at least that is my way of reading Mr. William's character, and I flatter myself I know something about mankind."

"Is it, sir?" said the Squire curtly. "Then I confess I have not discovered all these virtues in him; and since you have such an eye for them, I wish to Heaven he was your son instead of mine!"

"Well, we should not look a gift-horse in the mouth," said Mr. Waller gayly; "and upon my life, Blackburn, for all these little blemishes, of which you make so much, I have half a mind to take you at your word."

"How do you mean?" inquired the other, looking sharply up.

"Why, I mean that though I can not become his father, I should have no sort of objection, provided the arrangement prove agreeable to a certain young lady, of whom it does not become me to speak as she deserves—I should, I say, be very well pleased to be Mr. William's father-in-law."

"You would permit your daughter," began the Squire in tones that had almost as much of horror in them as of amazement—"I mean would you really let her run such a risk?"

Mr. Blackburn had an honest liking for Lucy Waller; he had only seen as much of her as a septuagenarian host would be likely to see of his granddaughter's friend and companion, but what he had seen had pleased him. It was certain that she was a dutiful daughter, and her father's right hand (as he often boasted), and it seemed to the Squire incomprehensible that Mr. Waller

should be ready to intrust the happiness of such a child to one like his son William. It was true that the Squire intended his own Ellen to marry Mr. Stanhope, who was said to be addicted to dissipation or at least to gambling; but, if Stanhope had been what he knew William Blackburn to be, her grandfather would certainly not have sacrificed her future to such a man, even to promote his most darling scheme. On the other hand, it must be conceded that Mr. Waller was really ignorant of William's thorough worthlessness, and took a most liberal view of his surface-faults.

"Risk," observed he slowly; "well, that is rather a harsh word. Of course, I must know more of the young man's character and antecedents"—here he shot a glance at the Squire, who shifted his limbs uneasily—"and, above all, must assure myself that such a match would not be distasteful to my sweet Lucy. But there is always more or less of uncertainty—a risk, if you must call it so—in every marriage; that is, unless young folks have been brought up together from the nursery, as Lucy and your late nephew were. Of course, that would have been the match most consonant with my own feelings, but man proposes (as poor Dick did), and Heaven settles things its own way. Our families, it seems, were not to be united by means of that branch—but, still, they may be united. I honestly tell you I have not much to give my daughter *down*, Blackburn—my capital is so locked up in different speculations—but she is not a pauper, and perhaps, if things turn out as I expect them to do, may some day be almost as great an heiress as your own dear Ellen.—I conclude, by-the-by," observed the ex-M. P. abruptly, "that though your purpose should hold to leave Redcombe to your granddaughter, that your son would be suitably provided for?"

"If he were to marry eligibly—such a young lady as your daughter, for instance," said the Squire earnestly, "I would give him—nay, I would settle upon herself—a very considerable sum."

"That is spoken like yourself, Blackburn, and I am sure you mean what you say, although, of course, our present talk may bear no fruit whatever—we may be building the merest castle in the air; and, at all events, any such event as that we have been contemplating must be yet a great way off. Your son is bewailing a recent calamity; my daughter also is suffering, although not so recently, from a similar bereavement. When speaking, on one occasion, of her sorrow, poor thing, she even made use of the expression 'widowed:' a common loss, however"—here Mr. Waller, under pretense of taking a fresh cigar, applied himself to composition—"itself sometimes attracts, so great is the power of human sympathy, two bruised and tender hearts towards one another."

"I noticed that that scapegrace son of mine paid a great deal of attention to your Lucy," said the Squire thoughtfully. "She is clever, and has a will of her own; but I honestly tell

you, Waller, I doubt whether even she will ever make a silk purse out of—"

"Stop at 'purse,'" interrupted Mr. Waller quietly; "I assure you she is a capital hand at making silk purses."

"If the silk purse is made out of the material in question," answered the other gravely, "I promise you it shall be well filled. If I could only see my son respectably settled in life—"

Here a terrible scream, apparently from the garden, broke the silence of the autumn evening; and Mr. Waller, with an activity beyond his years, rushed to the open window, and letting him self drop through it by his hands, hurried to the croquet-lawn, while his host made his way thither more circuitously by the front door.

For all the former's protestations to others, and specious arguments with himself, he had his own misgiving concerning his projected son-in-law, and in the instant when that sound broke forth it flashed upon him that some unpardonable rudeness of Mr. William Blackburn's had evoked it perhaps from Lucy herself. To do Mr. Waller justice, he would, in such a case, have done his best to wring the neck of that only scion of the House of Blackburn on the spot, and it was with some such intention that he had made such extraordinary speed. There was, however, nobody upon the lawn save Mr. William himself, who was lying face downward among the croquet-hoops, ejaculating "Snakes, snakes, snakes!" at the top of his voice. The ex-M. P. cast a hasty glance up at the boudoir window, which, to his great relief, was closed, and then approached the sufferer with cautious steps.

"Snakes, snakes, snakes!" reiterated Mr. William.

"What is the matter sir? There are no snakes at Redcombe," said the Squire, making his appearance from the terrace.

"There *are* snakes, snakes in my boots," persisted his son.

"Come, come, not in *both* boots, my good friend," observed Mr. Waller persuasively.

But by dint of violent struggles, Mr. William got himself free of his boots, and pointed to the empty pair with unaffected horror.

"Do *you* see snakes?" inquired Mr. Blackburn of his guest in much amazement.

"Ay, sea-snakes," persisted his son—"snakes from Formosa, snakes from the well-hole, so tall that you can see their heads at top. Look at their tongues, their long forked tongues! They've come to tell you about it. And yet, so help me, I never did it."

"What in Heaven's name, does all this mean?" inquired the Squire despairingly.

"It means exactly what I told you, Blackburn, that your son's brain is over-excited; he has fallen over one of these hoops, and the shock has put him off his head. He's quiet enough now, you see. But here come the servants: just say it's a fainting-fit, and leave him to me."

The ladies were fortunately in the drawing-room, which was on the other side of the house,

and the music of the piano had drowned the sufferer's cries.

"Don't alarm your mistress, or the young ladies," were Mr. Waller's first words; "but take Mr. William quietly into his own room by the back-way.—You need not go for the doctor, sirrah" (for a groom was already starting towards the village); "but lend a hand here, as I told you; your young master is overcome by the heat of the weather, that's all.—The case, my dear Blackburn, is quite simple, and I understand it perfectly well."

"Do as Mr. Waller bids you," said the Squire sharply, for the serving-men hesitated somewhat to lift such a burden up; the damp white face, the chattering teeth, the protruding eyes, were all so instinct with horror.

"Gently, now—gently," said Mr. Waller; "and you that have his wrists, hold them firm."

It was well he gave that order, for twice upon his way the patient writhed and struggled like a madman. "The snakes had wound about his limbs," he said, "and had him fast;" but at last they got him to his room, and into bed. Then Mr. Waller dismissed the servants, and he and the Squire stood together alone by the bed-side. William had fallen into a half sleep, full of starts and mutterings, and his eyes, which had looked as though their lids could never hide them again, were now almost closed.

"The paroxysm is over, my dear sir," said Mr. Waller soothingly; "and I don't think we shall have any more trouble with him, poor fellow. However, I'll just sit with him a bit, while you go down into the drawing-room, and explain matters to the ladies; it is better not to trust to the servants' silence. You can say that I have some important letters to write, which will account for my absence easily enough. And be sure you keep Mrs. Blackburn away from her son; say he is asleep, and must on no account be disturbed, for the fact is, in cases of this kind, the mind is apt to wander, and—"

"Is it *Delirium Tremens*?" inquired the old man huskily.

"Well, yes, it is undoubtedly a touch of D. T.," said Mr. Waller reluctantly. "It's a very slight attack—but still, you must keep his mother away. The very best of us had better not talk of ourselves, unreservedly, before our mothers. But as for me, I'm a man of the world, and not easily shocked."

"Nevertheless, it is my place to be here," said the Squire gravely, "and not yours."

"My dear sir, forgive me; but this is madness"—began Mr. Waller.

"Nay, forgive me," interrupted his host peremptorily; "this is my own house, and this is my own son, and I must have my way."

"Very good, Mr. Blackburn; I will do my best, then, to smooth matters below stairs. If he shows any symptoms of violence, ring for me; but if he continues to sleep on, as I trust he may, all will go well enough."

"I understand; and I am greatly obliged to you, Waller—deeply obliged."

"Don't mention it, my dear sir," I am delighted to have been of any use in this little matter. Such things occur every day, I do assure you, in the best families in the land; only it's better not to talk about them. Keep a good heart, my dear friend—and there's the bell within reach—and shall I bring you up the newspaper, or any thing? It is weary work to have to sit still and watch, though I'm quite accustomed to it, and don't mind it in the least myself."

The Squire shook his head to the offer of not only the newspaper, but to the implied renewal of Mr. Waller's proposal to take his place by his son's pillow; and the ex-M. P. softly closed the door behind him.

"An obstinate old gentleman," mused he, as he went down stairs. "If he would but have let me nurse that fellow, I should perhaps have known as much as Stanhope.—What the deuce, by-the-by, could he have meant by Formosa and the well-hole? I must make a note of that. I wonder whether this was his first attack. By its short duration, I should think it was; and yet it was precious sharp while it lasted.—Formosa, eh? This is what comes of sending one's eldest son where French brandy is eightpence a bottle. Gad, how he must have soaked!"

CHAPTER XXII.

AFTER LONG MONTHS.

If Mr. Waller imagined that, in default of gaining possession of the history of William Blackburn's past, the knowledge of the nature of his indisposition would still afford him some hold upon his young friend, he was fated to be disappointed; since, in the first place, D. T. was a malady not altogether unknown at Redcombe Hall, for the Squire's brother Charles had had more than one bout of it; and secondly, Mr. William himself was no more sensitive about the malady in question than if it had been the gout. The very simplicity of this gentleman's character—that is, his coarse and homely habits of vice—made him difficult to deal with for the ex-M. P. (who had been accustomed to influence men in a high state of civilization, if not of intelligence), and puzzled him, just as one ignorant of the use of the small-sword will sometimes puzzle an accomplished fencer.

When, for instance, a few days after this attack, Mr. Waller expressed his pleasure at seeing the young Squire up and about again, the latter replied, with startling frankness: "Well, I believe what you say for once, Mr. Smooth-tongue, for, if I had popped off the hooks, it would have spoiled a nice little game of your own, I reckon."

If Mr. Waller had had to consult his own feelings only, he would certainly not have remained, and far less have suffered Lucy to remain, a guest at Redcombe after that speech; but he could no longer afford to indulge his own self-respect, a luxury which, to say truth, he had been accus-

tomed to more or less forego for many years. His affairs were getting into greater embarrassment daily, and no other escape seemed to offer than that he had once looked upon as an eligible course, but which he was now obliged to own to himself was in fact a desperate remedy. He had not the courage to speak to his daughter upon the subject; but she well understood his critical position, and could perceive, he hoped, for herself the pressing necessity that compelled him to wish her to become William Blackburn's wife. Her conduct was such as to make him daily reproach himself with the cruelty of a scheme which he adhered to nevertheless; and though she had always done his bidding, it astonished him by its dutifulness. That she should evince the slightest liking for the man who, short as her acquaintance had been with him, had disgraced himself half-a-dozen times in her very presence by intoxication or bad language, and of whose conduct in the house and village there were already so many evil reports that it was scarcely possible but that some had reached her ears, was not to be expected; but it was something, and more than Mr. Waller had hoped for, that she did not shrink from the young Squire with abhorrence. She allowed him, if not to pay her court, to be more gracious to her than to others, and rather ignored his clumsy advances than forbade them. These attentions, indeed, now that he understood she was not his niece's humble companion, were not so rude and undisguised as heretofore, but they were such as a young girl of spirit might have naturally enough resented, especially in a suitor whom she regarded with disfavor, and yet she did not resent them. She even listened with patience to Mrs. Blackburn's dissertations upon the character of her son, which perforce did not so often take the form of eulogium (as they had done before his arrival), as of apology for his faults; and why should she do this unless she had made up her mind to make excuses for them herself.

Not only did her father argue thus, but Mrs. Blackburn also, who was as anxious for the match as he, and much more hopeful of its results; and so these two at least began to believe that in due course of time the thing was likely enough to come to pass. Curiously enough, however, this belief did not seem to be shared by the old Squire, who had so early expressed his approval of the plan, or, if it did, the contemplation of it seemed no longer to afford him pleasure. He had become of late a changed and broken man, and went about like one weighed down by some burden too heavy for him to bear. Some thought that in his old age the strong will which had supported him through half a century of hardships, had at last given way, and that he was fairly cowed by the rude profligate, his son. But the observant ex-M. P. held that there was some other cause which bowed that stalwart frame, and thinned those gray hairs day by day so visibly; for, in the first place, although he manifested a great repugnance to William Blackburn, if not an absolute loathing, yet he showed

no fear of him, but flamed upon occasion against that social offender, so that the culprit shrank before his ire; and, in the second place, William behaved himself with some respect toward his father, for a reason which Mr. Waller had not far to seek, and under an influence of which that manager of men was very jealous. He well perceived that it was to Herbert Stanhope that all improvements in the young Squire's behavior were owing, and envied him the possession of that rod of iron with which he ruled, so advantageously for the general good—if not for his own. As to whether Stanhope was gaining ground in Miss Ellen's good graces or not, Mr. Waller could not decide, nor was it indeed of much interest to him to know. The pair were not often, so far as he could observe, or could learn from his daughter, alone; and, indeed, with the exception of the old Squire, who shut himself up more than ever in his little room, in company only with his bottle of strong waters, the inmates of the Manor-house herded together a good deal, now the young Squire was arrived, just as small birds keep close company when a hawk is hovering. *Tête-à-têtes* were not frequent, and still less a solitariness which might be intruded upon by the unwelcome Mr. William, whose presence beneath that roof had also a marvellous effect in keeping it free from occasional visitors. Nobody that had not a special reason for it put themselves in the way of meeting the new arrival, who was even in the middle of the day as likely to be in liquor as not. Even Mr. Mowbray Moffat avoided the place, as indeed he had good reason to do, for he had experienced the young Squire's insolence. The house in short, was tabooed, as Anthony Blackburn had prophesied it would be. Lucy never left it, even for the garden, unless accompanied; but Ellen, when her uncle was supposed to be safely disposed of for the morning—and the safest place was the skittle-alley attached to the public-house in the village, where he liked to surround himself with a few choice sycophants—occasionally took long walks alone. Otherwise, if he found the opportunity, he would reproach her in graceless fashion upon the preference shown to her by her grandfather, and point out to her the infamous injustice of those testamentary intentions of which she could not be ignorant. Her only refuge against such persecution lay in a quarter to which he felt tolerably confident she would not venture, from maidenly reserve, to apply. If the good could only profit by the vices of the wicked, as the wicked advantage themselves by the virtues of the good, merit would not so often as it is its own reward.

In one of these lonely walks of hers, Ellen found herself where she would not have been had Herbert Stanhope been at his own house—in the pine-wood that skirted the grounds of Curlew Hall. The autumn was far advanced; but in that odorous and sheltered spot, with the sunshine striking down where the clearings were, and the keen wind busy only in the tree-tops, where it made a murmur like some distant sea,

it seemed to be summer still. The place had become a favorite haunt of hers of late; in its welcome seclusion, and fresh and fragrant air, she breathed more freely than elsewhere; and shook off the oppression which had settled down on almost all at home, though on herself the least, for in that atmosphere of plots and fears she fed on hope, and lived, in imagination at least, another life than that which hard fate had for the present assigned to her.

She had wandered farther than usual, or than she was aware of, almost to the verge of the wood which fringed the hill above the Mosedale Valley, in a line with the embankment of the reservoir, when she suddenly came upon what was very rare in that green solitude, a fellow-creature. A man with his back towards her was sitting under a tree, with a book in his hand; he was probably sketching, for his fingers moved rapidly; but, although artists were not uncommon about Redmoor in the warm weather, it was late in the season for that migratory race. She turned to retrace her steps, but the dry twigs crackled under her tread, and he looked round and rose. It was John Denton. She uttered a great cry of joy, and flew towards him—then stopped in wonder. His face was pale and sad, and though he could not have failed to recognize her, he did not stir a step. A strange thought took possession of her: it was not himself at all, but his wraith, come to tell her that all she had been living for was in the grave.

"John, dear John," cried she trembling, "why don't you speak to me?"

The tones were sad and hollow enough for any ghost, which answered: "It is for you to speak, Ellen, not for me; you know all that I would say."

She moved towards him, stretching out her arms. "Dear John, what is the matter? What has happened?"

"Nothing unusual," said he coldly, "that is with persons of your class. I dare say, to you it does seem nothing; but with me it is far different."

"Are you mad, John Denton?"

"Not yet, God help me!" answered he bitterly.

"Then you will remember this, John." She took from her bosom a little note-case, in which lay a faded sprig of heather: he had plucked it and placed it in her hand on that walk across the hills from Slogan when he had asked her to become his wife.

"I remember that well," said he, "only too well. Are you going to give it me back?—as ladies like yourself give back the rings and jewels of their old loves when they take on with a new one.—Oh, Nelly, Nelly! I knew that girls were weak, and that you, being what you are, would be more tried and tempted than other girls; but I did not think you would sell yourself for gold, nay, for less than gold—for an old name, and a long pedigree with a fool at the end of it."

"As true as the blue sky is above us, John, I understand nothing of what you say. Whatever

dreadful things you have to tell me, in Heaven's name speak out. What is it?"

"Is it possible that fourteen months of life among fine folks can make a woman so false as not to know it herself!" answered the other. "Well, it is not much matter, perhaps; but what I have heard from every mouth at Mosedale is, that Miss Ellen Blackburn (who was once so humble as to think of wedding such a man as I) is plighted to Mr. Herbert Stanhope, of Curlew Hall."

"That is a lie, John."

"A lie. It is one that is more believed than truth; the whole town rings with it."

"If the whole town had told me the like of you, John, nay, if the whole world had said it, and your lips had not confirmed their words, I would not have believed it. I have been tried, indeed—tried by your absence, tried by the lack of that which is my life-blood, the speech, the touch, the look of him I love, but never tempted, John; for in temptation there is some attraction, some delight, and I have never felt one touch of joy but in the thought of you."

"True heart, forgive me," exclaimed he, snatching the weeping girl to his breast. "I am all unworthy of such love, dear girl; but I have been all alone in the world so long, without one word to gladden me, and with ten thousand of late to pierce my heart—and—and you know Mr. Stanhope is staying at the Manor-house, Nelly. My very work, which was once so dear to me, has become flat and stale; I have been in this very place a score of times, notebook in hand, as now; and yet, see! nothing has been set down in it, because I could think of nothing except you!"

"Then that is why I have sought this wood so often, John, and loved it; my heart must have known that you were here, and brought me hither. But what brought you, dearest?"

"Well, not so much my heart, dear Nelly," said John, smiling, and tenderly smoothing her brown hair, "but my business. I have been at work at the embankment yonder for some time; and while my men are at their dinner, I step in here for solitude, and to make certain calculations, the result of which (as to-day) has been often a blank page."

"I knew you had been employed on the Reservoir, John; I went thither before you came, expressly to be able to picture you there—but I thought you had gone. Lucy—Miss Waller—told me that the affair would not keep you above a day or two."

"Ay, that's Mr. Waller of Mosedale's daughter, I suppose; but her father has misinformed her altogether. You see, Nelly," and though his arm was round her waist, and his eyes looked lovingly into hers, it was curious how abstracted and business-like his tones became, "it's a much more serious job than these directors imagine, and it will put out Flywheel immensely; but I can't help that. The whole concern wants looking to. I have been tinkering it up as well as I can; but it's my opinion the mis-

chief is deep seated, and must have a much more effectual remedy, or there will be great risk when the spring comes on. For my part, I mean to state as much in my report. But the fact is, the Company have very little cash, and don't want to be involved in expenses; and Flywheel is their engineer you see, not I. Nothing can be more pennywise and pound foolish (not to mention the danger), as it seems to me.—But there, why am I wasting precious moments, talking of these dry business matters, when the dearest girl in the world is waiting to hear me say for the fiftieth time how much I love her! And I do say it, and seal it, my own darling.”

“I like to hear you talk of your calling, John, and to see you so interested in it. I am prouder of it and of you than any one can possibly be of the things you were decrying just now, such as birth and blood. Nay, it is men like you who alone make birth and blood of any value, for who could be proud of ancestors who have done nothing?”

“A very logical view, my dear Nelly,” said the young engineer, his own cheek flushed with something of pride; “but not one generally entertained, and especially by your charming sex. Now, I wonder what the forefathers of this Mr. Herbert Stanhope, for instance, have done to make the race so much esteemed?”

“You always were jealous of Mr. Stanhope, John,” returned Ellen smiling; “and I have a great mind to punish you by praising him. He has his faults, and, I fear, his vices, but I can tell you, that I, in common with all at Redcombe Manor, have every day much cause to be indebted to him.”

“To him? How so?”

“Because he is the only person who has any influence over Uncle William.—You know my uncle is come back, I suppose?”

“I have heard that,” said Denton gravely.

“He is not improved, I am afraid, if half I hear about him is to be credited.”

“He is not what one would wish him to be, John,” sighed Ellen; “very far from it. He frightens us all sometimes—even his mother herself, he is so strange and violent. Aunt Bess is dead, poor thing; and oh, it's a sad story!”

“But he is going to repair that loss, as I understand, eh, Nelly? A widowed life does not suit him.”

“What do you mean, John?”

“Why, is he not going to marry Miss Waller? That is what they say at Mosedale.”

“Lucy marry Uncle William!” exclaimed Ellen. “Why, what will they not say at Mosedale about marriages? Oh no, John; I am quite sure that is not true.”

“Well, it's odd she and her father should stay at the Manor so long, when their own house is close by; although, indeed, for that matter, Mr. Stanhope does the same. Mr. Waller was so good as to offer me hospitality, only he said matters of urgent importance prevented his being at home just now.”

“Yes; Lucy said you were to be asked to be their guest; but grandfather pressed them to stay on with us.”

“Indeed,” said Denton coldly. He was naturally incensed with the old people, and had not even inquired after them. “Then you don't think the young lady is going to be your aunt-in-law?”

“Most certainly not, John. She does not like Uncle William nor his ways at all. Oh, they are such bad ways!”

“What do you mean, Nelly? Is he rude and brutal? Why do you suffer such things? Why do you remain under the same roof with such a fellow, when I have one to offer you?—not so fine a place as Redcombe, I dare say, but still fit for even a lady like you.”

“Oh, it isn't that, John. You know how gladly I would come to you—marry you, my own darling, but—”

“But what?” answered the young man softly. “Why not be mine at once, dear Nelly? Have you not done enough, suffered enough, for duty's sake? I will not speak of my own wretchedness; but yet I suffer also. Is an old man in his dotage—”

“Hush, John, hush! I can not listen to such words. You know how good grandfather has been to me all my life: and you must not ask me to desert him now, when he needs me more than ever—much more. I think it would kill him if I left him now. He has much, very much to trouble him. He is so changed of late, you would not know him. I am his only comfort, poor old man. Have patience with me, my own love.”

She nestled in his bosom, and pleaded with such tearful eloquence that he could not gainsay her. “I will try to have patience, Nelly, for yet a little longer: it can not be very long, surely.”

“Patience and faith, darling. Promise me you will have no more doubts. I am yours till death, and no other's.”

“I do believe that, dearest.”

“God bless you for those words, John! How thankful I am to have heard you utter them. But I must go now.—No, you must not come with me, nor be seen with me. You know I promised not to meet you; and then, if Uncle William only guessed—What's that?”

She started from his arms in terror; but there was no sound but the sighing of the wind above them.

“You are afraid of this William Blackburn,” said Denton gravely. “I must stop that.”

“No, no, John; I am not afraid; at least, not on my own account; but something dreadful always seems impending. Do not detain me longer. And remember, dear, have faith.”

She was gone in a moment, threading the wood with a swift and noiseless step; and the echo of her latest words seemed to be taken up by the tree-tops, which whispered above his head: “Have faith—have faith.”

CHAPTER XXIII.

LUCY'S OPINION IS CONSULTED.

ELLEN BLACKBURN had not exaggerated the case when she said that in her grandfather now found his only comfort. His face was never seen to smile unless she was looking up at it. He had no consciousness (as Mr. Waller had with regard to Lucy) that in favoring Mr. Stanhope's suit he was urging her to run a great hazard. He knew no more of that gentleman's pecuniary affairs than that he had not an income sufficient to live at Curlew Hall in a manner suitable to his station, while of his character and disposition he thought very highly, and in many respects no less than they deserved. He scarcely deemed that he was asking of Ellen any sacrifice of feeling. He had almost forgotten the existence of John Denton altogether, and that other and intermediate state of life in which he had met with him was fading fast from his remembrance. The state of affairs of half a century ago seemed in the old man's mind to join with the present almost without a break. He had been always the Squire, and the heir of Redcombe Manor, but for a certain interval, which waned and waned in his waning mind until it was almost imperceptible. But there was one occurrence during that interregnum which he did not forget, and, indeed, of which he would in any case have been put in daily remembrance by the misconduct of the original offender—namely, the crime and punishment of his only son.

So long as any record of them had existed, the Blackburns had almost always been a dissolute and vicious race; but, however they might have sinned against the Gospel, they had none of them broken the Laws. They had had no temptation to do so. Old Anthony did not understand that want of principle in a rich man is almost certain, in a very poor one, to show itself in crime. True, he himself had not much principle (in any high sense at least), and yet he had lain long years among the pots of poverty, and come out unsoiled at last. But then he had a substitute for principle in his indomitable pride. Nineteenths of the Blackburns before him had had something of this pride (though very few of them had any real self-respect) but in him it had taken root and flourished prodigiously. He had sat under it, as under his own fig-tree, throughout his exile, and it had served him in good stead in many a wind of bitterness; and though his son William (savage as he was) had hewed its branches and hacked its trunk, it still lived after a fashion, and ever and anon put forth a bud or two. It had borne the shock of William's return, and had been propped up and even drawn some strength and vigor from the thought that Herbert Stanhope would marry Ellen, and their children's children would perpetuate the good Blackburn blood, if not the name; but now there was a canker at its very core. "The old Squire is breaking up at last," was become a common saying about Redcombe. Those who looked

deeper thought there was no physical cause, but attributed the alteration in him to the shock he had received from his son's recent illness, the nature of which was by this time as well known for ten miles round the Manor as the shape of the Redcombe weathercock. It must be uncommonly unsatisfactory, they thought, to have one's only son come home after ten years' absence (the most moderate doubled the actual period) to take his proper position in the county—with *delirium tremens*.

And certainly a change in the old man, both mentally and bodily, had occurred exactly at that date. He had formerly taken a great deal of exercise—striding about his fields a wonder to his laborers (whose salutations he acknowledged without a word), or revisiting alone such of the ancient landmarks as still stood; but now he confined his rambles to the garden, or to that solitary part of the shrubbery called "the Wilderness," where he would walk to and fro for hours leaning on his granddaughter's arm. Few words were interchanged between them. She was afraid to encourage him to speak, lest he should make Mr. Stanhope his topic; but this, of late, he had only done on one occasion. After a long silence he had exclaimed suddenly: "I wish you had been married, Nelly darling, before this man had come back."

She of course knew who was meant. He never mentioned his son William, now, by name. "Nay, grandfather," said she, tenderly; "but then you would not have had my arm to lean upon. It is much better as it is. I am in no haste to wed."

"A good child—always a good child," returned he, patting her hand. "If the chance does come, if it is not too late, Nelly, take it—take it; never mind an old man like me. Yes, I am too old—much too old. Why did not I die on Slogan, as your poor father did, whom you never knew? Why did he die at all, and why does this other one live? Do you remember the hill Slogan, Nelly?"

"Yes, grandfather, indeed I do. All the people at work upon it like bees, and the sea and the ships below. I can see the upper level, where I used to take you your dinner, as plainly now as though it were really before my eyes."

"So can I, so can I, Nelly; though I can't always do it. I can't see so far, some days, for the mist. I mean," added he hastily, "for the mist in my eyes, for my brain is clear as ever—clear as ever. Where was I?"

"We were talking of Slogan and the upper level, grandfather."

"Yes, yes. That was where we first saw him, Nelly. An excellent young gentleman. He gave me sherry out of his pocket-flask; and somehow I never get such sherry now. Nothing is so good as it used to be."

"There are many things, grandfather, belonging to those old days, though they were hard ones, that one misses now—the noble prospects from the hills, and the glorious breezes from the sea, and—"

"The sea? Ay." He looked round cautiously and spoke low: "Formosa is in the sea, is it not, Nelly?"

"Certainly, grandfather—it is an island. But—what is the matter?"

"Nothing. I am not so young as I was, and I am tired. I must sit down a bit—that's all; I feel faint. If I have said anything foolish, it was that, Nelly—the being so faint. Don't say a word about it to any body, but I think it would do me good if I could only get to Slogan, and feel the air."

"I would that we had never left it, grandfather," exclaimed Ellen with involuntary bitterness. But the whole scene about the Moor Cottage was lying before her, with John Denton—honest sunbeam—in the midst.

"Not left it; that's nonsense, Nelly. Do you suppose he would have married you if we had stopped at that place? Never. As for me, though I am not happy, Nelly, not so happy as when I made the sparks fly with the big hammer, I am glad to be here, glad to have lived to make my will. It is a great and good thing that a dead man should be able to speak from out the grave, as I shall soon speak, lying in yonder churchyard, saying: 'All to this woman, and none—or only a little, to that man.' That is how I have left it, Nelly; Stanhope knows."

This was a subject upon which the Squire's mind was always clear, and one that he would often descant upon, much to Ellen's embarrassment.

"Let us talk of something else, grandfather. Do not speak of that. It is much better not to do so."

"Better not to do so," muttered the old man; "and yet, when I see her, and see him looking at her, I think I ought to speak. Poor Lucy!"

Ellen had paid small attention to these words; she was accustomed now only too often to find the old Squire rambling and inconsequent in his talk, although this rarely occurred unless they were alone together. In other company, he seemed to her (and the sight was very pitiful) to keep strict watch over himself, and check by sudden silence his tendency to wander. In her faithful presence only he was at his ease. When William was by, his father never spoke, except occasionally in tones of stern reproof; but his sunken eyes watched and followed his son's motions ceaselessly, as one who has a stick in his hand watches an adder.

To Lucy's wonder, the old Squire asked her to take Ellen's place one day, and give him her arm in his usual garden walk.

"I want you to speak to me, dear young lady," he began in tremulous tones, "as though I were your father's father, as indeed I am old enough to be. I want to know—" Here he stopped, and seemed to be casting about for some fitting word which would not come.

"To know what, dear Mr. Blackburn?" said she gently. "Let us sit down, for you seem fatigued, I think."

"Yes, yes; I am very tired—always tired now. But that will not be for long. I want to ask you—for you are a good girl, like my own Nelly, and your opinion is worth having—let me see, let me put it as I should do, and if not, you will make allowance, I know. I can not talk like my good friend Waller, with every word as it ought to be, and in the right place; but if he was to ask you: 'How do you like that man who has come here of late?' what would you say, now, what would you say?"

"How do I like Mr. William Blackburn, sir?"

"Yes, yes; who else? There he is yonder upon the terrace. A fine man—a man that will have money, perhaps. Hush, hush! There, I knew I should offend you."

"No, sir; I am not offended."

"Good girl, good girl! I always liked you, Lucy, always.—Now, how do you like that man?"

"Oh, sir, that is a question—forgive me—which I can not answer if his father puts it."

"But if your father had put it?—Come, *your* father?"

"He never *has* put it, sir. But if he did, it would be my duty—"

"No, no; I don't ask what would be your duty—the truth, the truth!"

"Well, sir, your son is rough and rude; not kindly, as you are, in his speech and ways. Maybe it is his misfortune, not his fault; but being as he is, I do not like him."

"Yes, yes; but there must be more than that, perhaps worse. Pray, tell me, for I am old, and may misjudge things: and I want to know."

"Well, sir, his manner to his mother displeases me, and to Ellen likewise."

"And to yourself? Do his ways to you—which I have often watched—displease you?"

"Sir, you press me somewhat unfairly; but, if I must needs tell the truth, they do."

"One question more, Lucy, and I have done—only one more. So much depends upon your answering it; take time. Do you think"—he clasped his hands together and looked into her face appealingly—"that he is hopelessly wicked and depraved—capable of any cruelty—any crime?"

"Oh, sir, I think no such thing. I can not reply to such a question."

"I see, I see," moaned the old man. "If he were ever so rich, and promised to improve, and though your father urged you to believe him—even then?"

"Sir, once for all, I could never love William Blackburn."

"I knew it, I knew it!" cried the old man, wringing his hands, "I ought to have spoken to him long ago, and I *will* speak to him to-day."

"Not about me, Mr. Blackburn!" exclaimed the young girl earnestly. "I do beg of you not to do that. Nothing he can say, nothing he can do, will alter matters between us two."

"Nor should they, my dear girl, nor should they," answered the old squire. "He shall never trouble you more. He shall go away

whence he came. I am master still in my own house, and I will not have him here."

"I should be very sorry, Mr. Blackburn, very sorry to be the means, however innocent, of any rupture between you and your son. Please to spare me the pain of having thus requited your hospitality. You asked me in strict confidence, remember, to answer you certain questions, and I have answered them in confidence likewise."

"You shall not marry him, Lucy, never fear. Your father shall have the money, all the same. It's all money, money, nowadays; in my time—but there, that was long ago—folks married for love."

Lucy was scarlet. It was terrible to hear her father's scheme thus openly spoken of by this doting old man. If he knew, must not all the world know, and cry shame upon her! Tears of anger, of wounded pride, ran fast down her cheeks.

"Don't cry, girl," resumed the old man in a firm and altered voice; "that man yondershall never have you in his power. I will see to that. I am glad you have spoken; I had but very little hope, and it is dead without much pain. I am stronger for knowing the truth—stronger to cope with him—stronger to overcome him. He shall see."

The old man rose from his seat with a vigor he had not shown for months, and straightened his huge frame as of old. There was no tremor in his limbs now, as he moved slowly down the winding walk towards the terrace, though he moved alone, for Lucy remained upon the garden-bench with her face hidden in her hands. When he reached the level sward of the croquet-ground he stopped for an instant, but only to take breath, then walked straight up to his son, who was leaning on the terrace balustrade smoking a short pipe, and tapped him on the back.

"I want you, sir, for a few minutes' conversation in my room;" then strode on without waiting for a reply.

Mr. William Blackburn shrugged his shoulders, tapped his pipe against the stone, to empty it of its contents, and muttering to himself: "I wonder what the old fool is up to now," followed the Squire into his sanctuary.

CHAPTER XXIV.

WILLIAM'S CHANCE.

WHEN his son entered the room, Anthony Blackburn was already seated in the high-backed black armchair, which was his usual place; his eyes were fixed upon something on the wall, which was not a picture, although it was set in a frame, and on this he seemed to gaze, as if unconscious of his son's presence.

"Well, father, what is it?" Mr. William's tone was sharp and sullen, and had the effect which was intended—of awakening the old man from his reflections.

"I want to say a few words to you, William,"

said the old man, in tones that were strangely different from those in which he had last spoken; no longer stern, but hesitating, and grave, and sad. "Sit down; no, not here, but yonder." William took the chair indicated, more remote from his father than the one he had selected, and sat down on it with a hang-dog look.

"Do you know what I have been looking at for the last minute or two?"

"Yes," growled the other; "Family Tree."

This interesting record of the House of Blackburn ornamented one side of the fireplace, as dead Ferdinand's hunting-map did the other, and had certain marks of red ink upon it, such as are seen in wreck-charts to indicate "Totally lost." These marks were placed opposite to the names of those of the Squire's forefathers who had served the ancient and honorable office of high sheriff. In no other respect, so far as public affairs were concerned, had one Blackburn ever differed from another. The country at large, nor even the county, had not been wiser or better for any one of them. Yet, like any other old tree, which, though without fruit or foliage, has stood for centuries, it was respected by many folks for its mere pertinacity of vegetable life; while the Squire himself regarded it much as the African regards his fetish; he worshipped it with a veneration that amounted to awe, and without even asking himself a reason for the faith that was in him.

"Three hundred and fifty years," he murmured, "have we lived at Redcombe, father and son, father and son!"

"And very right too," was Mr. William's practical reply. "It would have been a pity and a shame ever to let a girl in, when there was a male heir."

"A girl. Ah! that reminds me," said the old man with a deep sigh. "I tried to-day, William—I did give you that chance—whether an honest girl—one who would not have pained me if she could have helped it, I know—had any one good word to say for you, or of you. I thought to myself, if she can see any good in him, the terrible thought I have got into my old head can not surely be true. I would rather have believed myself to be in my dotage—much rather. But she thinks of you like the rest—like all the rest."

"I don't know who you mean by all the rest, sir," answered William angrily; "but there are people in this house who know very well upon which side their bread is buttered. There's Miss Ellen, for one—"

"Hush, hush, sir!" interrupted Anthony, with dignity; "I will not have a word said against Ellen. She has no fault except that she is not a man—my grandson instead of my granddaughter."

"Well, that change is not likely to happen, is it?" inquired William.

"There's your mother likes you, to be sure," continued the old man, taking no notice of this playful rejoinder. "That would be something, if she were not your mother."

"The old cuss has lost his last wits," thought William to himself. "If Ellen was his grandson, and his wife were not my mother! He has become a drivelling idiot."

"And yet, God knows, I would give forty thousand pounds, ay, and house and land, and all I have in the world, not to believe it of you.—Don't come nearer, sir; keep where you are."

At the mention of so large a sum, William had involuntarily hitched his chair a little nearer to his father. Notwithstanding his doubts of the old man's mental capacity, he shrewdly and justly suspected that the figures of the sum mentioned as being at the Squire's disposal were tolerably correct, and he felt himself irresistibly attracted towards the possessor of such a sum of ready money, and inclined to conciliate him at any cost. Even the most sullen of misanthropes will endeavor to make himself agreeable if the temptation is strong enough. But the tone of his father's speech was far more forbidding even than the words themselves; and his manner had a certain loathing and shrinking in it, which (though he knew he was no favorite) he could not at all explain, and which frightened him a little, notwithstanding that he once more murmured to himself: "He is out of his wits, that's all."

"What could the old fool be driving at? and why did he keep him at a distance thus, as though his touch, and even his nearness, carried contagion?"

Anthony's eyes had returned to the Blackburn pedigree, and it was full a minute before he spoke again.

"If I ask you one question, William, will you answer me truly—just the truth, and no more? These men here, your forefathers as well as mine, were men of their word. It used to be said, though they had their faults: 'As sure as a Blackburn's word;' and perhaps this one virtue may remain in you yet, notwithstanding— But no; that is impossible;" and the white head and beard shook slowly from side to side.

"What is it you mean, sir?" interposed William with simulated indignation. "I tell no more lies than my neighbors. If you come to that, you are not so particular about truth-telling yourself, it strikes me, since Mr. Waller is such a friend of yours. You don't suppose that soft-spoken gentleman never tells a lie, do you? And Lawyer Moffat, too, he's another; and there's plenty more I could tell off on my fingers, if—"

"How did Bess really die, William?"

The effect of this sudden and most unexpected question was curious enough. Not only did he to whom it was put remain silent, with his lips apart and his face of an ashen paleness, but the questioner also turned as ghostly as himself. In the case of the former, this was explicable; for the old Squire had never before evinced the slightest interest in his daughter-in-law's supposed fate, any more than he had in her while she was alive; and as for other folks, William

had easily silenced their inquiries as to detail with a few sullen words. Nobody cares to press a bad-natured man upon a distasteful matter, as the widower had taken care to show this was to him; and when his mother had been inclined to be curious, he had treated her successfully, much as he had treated the jail chaplain: "Don't ask me about poor Bess, mother; the subject is too distressing to me. Her end was peace, and let that content you." Which it did, and the more so, since the nature of the reply convinced her how much there was of good in the character of her darling son, though many doubted it, because, forsooth, it did not always crop out upon the surface.

Thus Mr. William, who, according to his promise at that harsh meeting, had transmitted to his wife the considerable sum of money paid to him by Richardson, had begun to consider the existence of Bess as an obstacle surmounted, a matter that was not to trouble him more; and this sudden reference to her from so unexpected a quarter embarrassed him exceedingly. What could it matter to his father how she died? and especially how could it so matter that the mere anxiety for the reply should change his face, so that it seemed more like that of a dead man—but for that same shrinking, loathing look which had come out afresh and more marked even than before—than that of the once ruddy Squire? He felt more alarmed and more at a loss for an answer than if the old man had asked him: "Is your wife really dead?" Of course he had crudely contrived the story of her death, before he had ventured home. She had died of consumption (with which she had long been supposed to be threatened), and he had nursed her for many a long day and night. Not much of detail could be expected of such an end, and little, as we have said, had been asked for. But now, not only had inquiry thus unexpectedly arisen, but one which seemed to discredit his own statement.

"How did Bess really die, William?"

Absolutely nothing occurred to his conscience-stricken mind, at the moment, except procrastination; for evidently his father was in possession of some important fact, and the want of accord with it in his reply might be fraught with danger to his dearest hopes. He was as much in love with Lucy Waller as his coarse and selfish nature permitted him to be, and he was not going to own to any one that Bess was living, until he was absolutely obliged.

"Well, it is a very distressing story, father."

"I ask, how did she die? If her end was such as you told your mother, there must have been a certificate of death; let me have *that*. But no; you are not to be trusted. I will write for it to Formosa myself."

"You would give yourself a needless trouble, sir," replied William Blackburn slowly. He saw the danger looming large and near before him; and since there was a lie that lay ready to his tongue by which it might be evaded, he did not hesitate a moment to make use of it. "No such certificate exists; and since you press me so un-

mercifully—though I had hoped to spare myself so sad a story—I must needs tell you why my poor wife was never buried.”

The window was closed, and there was a fire on that late autumn day in the little room, yet the old man shivered, and seemed to shrink within himself.

“One moment, sir,” said he in trembling tones. “You talk of sparing yourself; I am a very old and broken man; spare me. I do not know for certain what you are about to say. But if—if you are conscious in your mind—of something (and your face seems to tell me so) which it is better for your father not to hear—some act that no eyes save those of the All-seeing have witnessed, and which should make you hide yourself from the sight of man forever, do not tell me the lie which your lips are about to frame. If you have any touch of feeling left for him that begat you, do not speak. I shall understand (Heaven help me!) your silence well enough. Go in peace, if God has peace to give you, and never darken these doors again. You shall have money without stint; but go; steal off at once; the money shall be sent wherever you appoint; but as you value your worthless life, dare not to pollute your mother’s loving lips with a kiss of farewell.”

The old Squire looked furtively up with haggard eyes, and beheld on his son’s face a look of the most genuine and unfeigned amazement.

“What!” continued he, with a strange tremulous joy, which seemed to pervade his very limbs as well as his speech, “is it possible that I deceive myself, that I have been racked and tortured for so long by a baseless suspicion? Speak, William, speak; and if you are innocent, if you have not done this deed, I swear I will forget all else you have done amiss, and only remember that you are my only son.”

Perhaps there are no men so base, but that beneficent Fortune now and again affords them some opportunity of starting afresh in the race of life, less weighted than could reasonably be expected by the transgressions of their Past. The unseaworthy and wretched bark on which they have been aboard so long, nears the land so close that it does but require one stride to be ashore and safe. They have had experience enough (as one would think) of the stormy sea, now raised on the froth of the wave, now sunk in its gloomy trough, and it needs but a moment’s courage, one quick decisive step, to reach *terra firma*; and yet how seldom they take it! Such a chance now presented itself to William Blackburn, and he deliberately declined to avail himself of it. It had become possible for him, in a quite unexpected and not-to-be-hoped-for fashion, to be reconciled with his father; to have all old scores wiped out, no matter how heavy they might be (it was impossible, looking on his father’s face, to doubt it), provided only that he should make a clean breast of it, and tell the truth. But the condition was too hard. It seemed so much easier to use the materials of the lie which he had, as it were, by him.

“I can make no sort of guess, father,” said

he coldly, “of the nature of the particular suspicion which you harbor against me just at present. You have been suspicious of me all my life, and more or less, as now, without cause. As to silence respecting my wife’s death, I have no reason to keep silence except that which I have already mentioned, the desire to spare myself, but more particularly my mother, a painful narration. Poor Bess came to her end, not indeed by consumption, but after a much sadder fashion. Her death was the result of accident—poor soul, she was drowned.”

There was a long pause, and a silence unbroken, save by the autumn wind moaning at the casement, and a cinder dropping from the fire.

“At sea?” asked the old man in a hollow voice, in which there was still the distant echo of a hope.

“No, sir, not at sea. When walking in the dusk about Formosa, she fell down a steep and terrible place they call the well-hole—”

Anthony Blackburn rose with a piercing cry, and tottered to the window-corner, as though to put as great a space as possible between him and his son.

“You lie, you lie!” cried he; “she did not fall. You pushed her down. I heard it from your own lips the other night, when you were raving. You told the truth then; yes, you did—you did. Murderer! murderer!”

The window was violently thrown open from the outside, and Herbert Stanhope strode over the sill.

“What is the matter, Mr. Blackburn? Has this fellow dared to strike you?”

Old Anthony had sunk upon the ground, his shoulders only supported by the angle of the wall. His limbs hung strangely loose and still, and his lip was drawn up on one side; but still he made shift to speak. “No, no; he has not smitten me; it is Heaven that has smitten me.—Keep near me, Stanhope—keep quite close—and send him away out of my sight forever.”

CHAPTER XXV.

JENNINGS’S LEASE.

DOCTORS were summoned, of course, from far and near; they came, and went, taking their fees with them, but leaving the old Squire of Redcombe precisely as they found him, alive and likely to live, so far as continuance of breath was concerned, but a wreck in mind and body. One side of him was totally paralyzed. The stalwart limbs that had borne him so bravely through so many hardships, the giant arms that had been wont to lift such weights and strike such blows, were to do work no more. Even his speech, which for a time had wandered with a vague indistinctness only too consonant with his dim and confused thoughts, had ceased to be intelligible. Only his eyes were still quick and restless, and evinced such evident loathing and repugnance at his son’s presence,

that the doctors had forbidden his approach to the sick-room. It was quite usual, they said (for what will they *not* say upon occasion?) for a person thus afflicted to take unaccountable aversions to those who were nearest and dearest to him. They received Mr. William's account of his parent's seizure with the most grave credulity. He said that his father and himself were having some slight disagreement—it could scarcely be called a dispute—about the letting of the Home Farm, as to the tenant's right of shooting game, when all of a sudden the old man had started up, with cries of "Away, away!" and "Don't come near me!" and then had fallen on the floor. That was absolutely all that had occurred.

The great Dr. Fleam, and the great Dr. Pulsatilla, who had each founded schools of medicine diametrically opposed to each other, were unanimous with the local practitioner that such cases were by no means uncommon—that is, they were so when interrogated by ignorant, anxious Mrs. Blackburn. When the three medicos were alone, Dr. Fleam had quietly observed, and Dr. Pulsatilla had gravely nodded his adhesion to the pregnant inquiry: "Do you think it likely, Mr. Allcase, that there was any actual physical violence?"

The local practitioner, sitting, with an air of much deference, upon the extreme edge of his chair, had replied: "I think *not*, gentlemen—I really think *not*. Mr. Stanhope informs me that he put that question to Mr. Blackburn at the time, and it was answered in the negative."

As the final result of the consultation, an electric battery was sent down from town, which was so far of use that its presence terrified the servants from approaching their master's room; and perfect quiet, it was decreed, was above all things necessary to him. Finally, so great were the resources of science, that a slate and pencil were provided, in case the invalid should recover the use of his fingers and be able to express his thoughts.

Thus Redcombe Manor became a hospital, and also, in a sense, to one of its inmates at least, a prison. Lucy Waller was as fast bound and tied to the spot as the Squire himself; for, urged her father, would it not be the height of ungraciousness to leave the hospitable old man in so sad a plight, when her occasional presence (as it evidently did) afforded him pleasure. But he did not also add, that the storm which had been so long threatening his own affairs had burst, and would have sunk him altogether but for the rumored engagement of his daughter to William Blackburn, with which he pacified his more pressing claimants, as with a promise to pay. So long as he remained with her beneath the Squire's roof, these bills on the Bank of Expectation might obtain currency and credit; but should he leave it, his creditors, he was well aware, would begin to question the security.

To her father's arguments in favor of remaining at the Manor, Ellen's entreaties were added, to whom indeed Lucy's companionship was be-

come more than ever grateful. After long watches by her mute grandfather's pillow, it was a relief indeed to take a brisk walk with her friend (for it had become too cold for croquet), or to seek with her that common ally, the piano, or to hear her clear voice read aloud the literature to which her own youth in its chill poverty had been a stranger, but that Lucy had taught her to love. In one respect, although their affection was so genuine, their friendship differed from that between most young ladies. At night when they repaired to one another's rooms to brush out their back hair—an operation which (perhaps from its electrical nature) has commonly quite a magical effect in eliciting mutual confidences—they did not speak to one another with total unreserve: perhaps one or both had a secret of her own which she wished to preserve, or perhaps it was only that they tacitly agreed to keep silence upon certain topics.

Herbert Stanhope of course remained at Redcombe. The Squire's "Keep near me"—the last intelligible request he had made—was an invitation so pressing that it might almost have saved his conscience for continuing there, notwithstanding the mercenariness of his scheme and the very moderate hope of its success. He knew that it was base, as a once rejected and still unwelcome suitor, to inflict his presence upon the daughter of the house; but, on the other hand, was he not useful to her, as indeed he was to all the rest, as a friend and protector? Without him what anarchy would there not have been at the Manor, with coarse William as Lord of Misrule? Even Mrs. Blackburn, who saw the velvet glove without guessing at the hand of steel, confessed that nobody understood her Willy so well as Mr. Stanhope. As for her husband, he was still eloquent, so far as eyes could speak, in his regard for the young man. They followed him with eager, restless looks, and glanced from him to Ellen and from Ellen to him in a manner so wistful as to be unmistakable. To do Stanhope justice, he took no advantage of this favor to urge his suit, but seemed content to trust to time and its effects, the impression produced by his respectful but unceasing attention, his dexterous management of the common tyrant, and delicate consideration for his host and hostess, evinced in a hundred ways. Since he was present, and this John Denton away, he must, he concluded, surely be making progress, while the other receded in the young girl's good graces, or at most stood still; and one day it could not be but that he must needs get level with his rival, and the next day pass him. That is how one man always does cut out another with a woman, as "Sporting Dawlish" had observed in one of his practical philosophic letters.

That gentleman's correspondence had of late, however, become less philosophic than practical. He had hinted that his friend was making too much of a waiting race with the Blackburns, and had better go in and win. He had himself given a sop here and a sop there—and, so far

as he was concerned, "Herby" was quite welcome to the temporary accommodation—but nothing would prevent "people talking," and very unpleasant things had begun to be said. The absence of his friend from his usual haunts during the end of autumn had been commented upon without much scruple, and although Dawlish softened the expressions, he rendered them with sufficient faithfulness to prick his correspondent's pride—as he intended to do—to the very quick. Stanhope already owed Dawlish himself, for these friendly advances, more money than he could pay without parting with that remnant of the Curlew Hall estate which he could still call his own—and these advances were mere drops in his ocean of debts, the burden of which sat none the more lightly upon him because they could not be exacted by the law. If his present intentions were dishonorable, it must be conceded that his chief desire for their success arose from a certain sort of honor too—very much (though he would not have relished the parallel) as King Herod kept his royal word at the expense of his captive.

By help of the hold which Stanhope possessed over William Blackburn, he could doubtless have squeezed out of him a temporary loan, had that gentleman possessed the money; but he was, in truth, almost as much in want of funds, or at all events as destitute of them, as either of his father's guests, a fact which Mr. Waller had ascertained by practical experiment. The ex-M.P., on the presumption of their future relationship, had actually attempted to borrow of his possible son-in-law, and failed. Fortunately for herself, Lucy was ignorant of the degradation she had thus been subjected to, nor did she suffer from it (as would otherwise have certainly been the case) in the increased familiarity of the young Squire's manner, for a reason with which we are acquainted. If he did not persecute her with marked attentions, it was because he did not dare bring matters to the point at which he must needs acknowledge himself as a suitor for her hand. Although, by having cut himself loose from his matrimonial moorings, he might indeed win a bride, he could of course not wear one; while Bess was alive, no matter how cruelly he had menaced her, or how sternly he had enjoined silence, he could never marry. There was not a day in which he did not secretly regret that he had not put that murderous scheme of his into execution, and made himself a free man in fact, and not merely in appearance. If those ravings of his, the listening to which had wrecked old Anthony in body and mind, had only been true! As it was, he had all the credit with his father of having put an end to Bess, with no sort of compensating advantage. If the Squire should recover his wits, the first use he made of them would doubtless be to settle on him some sum which, compared with his reasonable expectations, would be a mere pittance for life, and to exile him from Redcombe, and probably from England, forever. While, in case of the invalid dying without sign (as seemed by far

the most probable), he would still be left by the old man's will without adequate, or, at all events, as compared with Ellen, proportionate provision. That a will that did thus unjustly distribute the family property was in existence, he knew for certain. The Squire himself had as good as owned it. Lawyer Moffat, whom he had had the imprudence to rudely interrogate upon the matter, had not denied it. He had only said: "You had better direct your inquiries to your father, sir. If the will were in my possession, it would be most dishonorable in me to accede to your request" (for William had even asked to see it); "but, as a matter of fact, I have not got it."

The lawyer had spoken with an irritation apart from that which his question had aroused; for one of the first acts of old Anthony, upon his coming to Redcombe, had been to transfer all the family documents from Mr. Moffat's keeping to his own. Perhaps he feared that his scapegrace son might, one day or other, tamper with his agent, as indeed he would certainly not have hesitated to do, had the opportunity been afforded to him; or perhaps he preferred to hold in his own hands the title-deeds of his house, to have tangible possession of what had so long been a mere dream of wealth. But, at all events, much to Mr. Moffat's chagrin, he had carried off the fire-proof box labelled "Blackburn Estate," which had so long been the chief pride and ornament of "the office," and placed it in his bedroom at home. He had also retained possession of his own will. The lawyer's manner convinced William Blackburn, even more than his words, that he had in truth not got it, and, in fact, that it was somewhere at the Manor-house. But if so, where had the old Squire hid it? In what particular spot was this piece of parchment, the existence of which debarred him from his just rights, and the destruction of which would restore them to him—make him his father's sole heir! Truly, a pregnant question.

Since the old man's seizure, months had now elapsed, during which Mr. William, debarred by the doctor's orders from the sick-room, and left a good deal to himself by the presence there of the rest of the family, had had much indoor leisure, and he had consumed it in a singular fashion. The time he had spared from billiards with Mr. Waller, and brandy-and-water with himself, had been devoted to hide-and-seek. As in that innocent game, the seeker had had no desire (at present) for the object itself—for his father might recover and inquire for it—but merely to know where it was. He searched high and low, in places probable and in places almost impossible, but he could not find it. He did not even know whether he had ever been near finding it, since there was nobody to tell him when he was "warm." But, after all, he was not seriously disappointed, since the most promising cover remained yet undrawn. One of the most likely places where the Squire would keep his will was in that same strong-box in his own bed-

room, and that, in the present case, was the very spot which his son was personally unable to explore. His native cunning, however, after much counsel with himself, enabled him to get this done by deputy. There had been really some disagreement between his father and himself (although not at the date he had assigned to it) concerning the right of shooting enjoyed by the tenant of the Home Farm, and he easily contrived to make out to Mrs. Blackburn that the matter was a serious grievance. It was nothing to him personally, he said, but it was very irritating to feel that the Squire's good-nature was being imposed upon. He was unwilling to trouble that fellow Moffat (who had behaved to him so disrespectfully), but if he could only see a copy of the lease in question, one look at it would decide the matter at issue. It was probably in the strong-box in his father's chamber, along with the other law documents, and he would be much obliged if his mother would just get it out for him.

She had replied, as he had expected, that for her part she did not know one law document from another. "Then," said he, "some night, when you are keeping watch alone, bring them all to me, and in half an hour you shall have them back again."

"But I hardly think, if your poor father were aware, Willy, that he would like me to meddle with the box," hesitated Mrs. Blackburn, who, with all her weakness for her son, was loyal to the husband of her youth. "I have never done any thing on the sly, as it were, nor against him; and now that his poor wits are wandering—no, no, I could never take advantage of that, Willy."

"But, mother, I am only asking you to do something for his own good; something which, if he was right in his mind, and fit to form a judgment upon things, he would wish done himself. I tell you, he has been imposed upon by Farmer Jennings, and that ought not to be. Nor is he the only one who has imposed upon father of late, as you well know. There is a regular cabal in the house against you and me, because we stand always together, we two."

"As we always shall, my darling," added his mother gratefully, for it was not often that her son exhibited such affection.

"Well, let us do so now, then," said practical William. "You must get me a glimpse of these papers, and also take care that no one sees you doing it. They are all jealous of my 'interference,' as they choose to term the interest I take in my father's affairs, which are surely also my own, and yet how long is the estate to go without a master! It is impossible to say when father may recover, even if he recover at all, and in the mean time every thing is at Mr. Moffat's mercy."

"But every body says Mr. Moffat is an honest man, Willy. Mr. Waller, who has been his neighbor so long—"

"Yes, yes; but has he no reason for saying—?" broke in William impatiently—"no in-

terest in letting things be as they are? Why, Waller could always wind my father round his little finger, and will do so more than ever, if the old man should ficker up a little."

"But Mr. Stanhope, who is such a friend of yours, Willy, even he says—"

"He says," hissed the other savagely. "You might as well say 'Ellen says' at once. Oh yes, he is my friend with a vengeance; such a friend as would strip me bare and wear my clothes. They would stick at no lie to do it. If either of them saw you bringing me the papers, that would be the ruin of me, mind that. And yet, as I said, there is no harm in it, but only good.—Now, don't argue about it, mother; because, you know, I hate to be argued with. It's only the lease I want, and even that only to look at. You shall have all back in half an hour or less.—When is it you have to watch with father next?"

"I shall be left alone with him from twelve to-night, William"—that was the only form which his mother's displeasure ever took: when some request was made of her more unreasonable than usual, she would call him (but still granting it), instead of Willy, "William."

"Then bring me the papers at two; I shall be waiting for them in my room. Be sure there is nobody stirring; and close the strong-box softly, so as not to wake father. There, that's well; and now I know you really love me."

"I think you might have known that before, Willy," sighed Mrs. Blackburn. She felt she was about to do wrong, and yet she could not—perhaps, though she did not even own it to herself, she dared not—refuse her son. In the middle of the night, then, when all the household, including the invalid himself, were asleep, she rose softly from the sofa-bed by her husband's side, and opened the strong-box, the key of which, always kept in a cupboard in "the Squire's Room," William had given to her. There were a good many documents in the box, but she managed to wrap them all in a towel, and carry them to her son's room: "There are fifteen," whispered she as she gave them into his hands.

"Why should you have counted them? You did not suppose I meant to steal any, did you?" was his harsh reply.

She had not, in fact, entertained any such suspicion; but when he spoke thus, her heart misgave her; not on her son's account, even then, but on her own. She felt more than ever that she was doing wrong; for if William could hint such a suspicion of himself, what might not others hint if the thing were discovered? At the time appointed she returned to his room. He was waiting for her with the parcel. "Jennings was right," said he; "but I am glad the matter is set at rest." Yet his tone was full of sullen disappointment, and his face pale—something, indeed, so strange was there both in tone and face, that before returning the documents to their receptacle, Mrs. Blackburn found herself counting them over,

and a sigh of relief involuntarily escaped her when she found the fifteen were there. As she closed the lid, she looked round mechanically, and by the dim glimmer of the night-light, she could see her husband's eyes, which she had thought fast closed, fixed earnestly upon her. Their look of keen reproof cut to her very heart!

"Have we been man and wife for fifty years," it seemed to say, "to be sundered thus at last!"

"I meant no harm, dear Anthony," answered she to this mute appeal, falling upon her knees beside his pillow. "It was only Jennings's lease, that Willy wanted to look at, and which he has been seeking for high and low; indeed, that was all."

But the poor fading brain could, as it seemed, comprehend nothing about Jennings's lease; it could only understand, and continue by that reproachful gaze to show that it understood, how old age and sickness, and the visitation of God, had been taken advantage of by one who had sworn to be faithful and true, notwithstanding all such things. She knelt for hours trying to comfort him, not without repentant kisses, bitter tears, but old Anthony would not be comforted. He had "flickered up," as William had phrased it, with a vengeance; and his wife, instead of longing—as the watcher even more than the sick man is wont to long—for the morning, dreaded its coming, since others must then needs behold those reproachful eyes, and ask their meaning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE SQUIRE SPEAKS.

It was plain to all who sought the sick-room that day—and it was the morning custom even of his guests to look in with a kind nod and a smile, of which the old man seemed generally to be more or less conscious—that there was some change in the Squire's face. It was wont to be so still and quiet, immobile as a sculpture, always excepting the eyes—and now the wrinkled features were twitching and perturbed. Love and Duty, helped by Use, had hitherto been able to decipher his mute requests and supply his simple needs; but now they were at fault. It was plain that there was something wanted for which that scanty language had no sign. Wanted! Nay, yearned for. It was impossible to misunderstand him so far. And yet how to satisfy an unknown desire? There were sharp wits at work to interpret for him, too. Not only his wife, repentant for the pain she had involuntarily caused him, and eager to make amends; and Ellen, whose loving eyes had ever been quickest to flash responsive to his dumb appeals; but Lucy Waller, always composed and prompt; and her father, who knew men so well, and all their needs, as he fancied—but not men in such a strait as this, and *their* needs; and Herbert Stanhope, keen and observant, and as willing as Ellen herself.

He was really touched by the old man's condition, and could not regard it in the philosophic and abstract way that Mr. Waller was wont to do over his after-breakfast cigar.

"Gad, sir, it's terrible," that gentleman would observe. "One has heard of one leg in the grave: but our poor friend yonder has every thing in the grave except his eyes. It is as you might say, death in life; and there is no knowing how long it may last, for he is but about seventy. It would be a happy release to him, one might almost say, if he were to have done with it all."

Some men are like the crows, who, when any of their brethren are smitten (or seem to be so) with a mortal disease, adopt at once the "Happy Release" theory. And yet Mr. Waller was by no means a heartless person, and was a very good-natured one. He cudgelled his subtle brains as soundly as the rest to get at the poor Squire's meaning, and would have given what he had to discover it. Mrs. Blackburn, not without an inward struggle and a blush in her withered cheeks, had pointed to the strong-box, and even shown her husband its contents, in case it was concerning them and their safety that those still piteous glances were so anxious. But Anthony closed his eyes, in token that his need did not lie there, and then opened them again, to rove from face to face with the same urgent inquiry as before. Mr. Allcase had been sent for in the first instance, but he had been summoned away on some parochial emergency, in the night, so that Science was not at hand to solve the difficulty, which it probably might have done. It has been said indeed, by some one, doubtless, who owed medicine a bad turn; "Leave Nature to herself" (as though she were a child in a passion), "and she will come round;" but surely there are cases where skill can hasten her movements. Thus a doctor might have drawn at once a deduction from the poor Squire's altered features, which it took unlearned helpfulness hours to draw.

"Do you think, grandfather," said Ellen, driven to her wits' end, and when all were weary with touching and pointing and asking "Is it this?"—"Is it that?"—"that you could write down the first letter, if I brought you the slate?"

This implement had been tried and found useless so often that it had long ago been thrown aside, and even placed in another room. Scarce a muscle of poor old Anthony—save a certain involuntary twitching of the mouth—had stirred for months, and far less a finger. But no sooner did Ellen utter the word "slate," than, like fire to flax, it lit up the white bearded face with eager joy.

Eureka! The problem was solved so far, at all events. They brought slate and pencil, and released his nerveless hands from the clothes that covered them, and propped him up with pillows, and watched as men of old might have watched at some Sibyl's cave for her vague prophecy; and scarce could one of her leaf-inscribed mysteries, after the wind had taken the rest, have

been more difficult and inscrutable. He strove, and strove; but only could you trace some wandering scratches, a spider-web scrawl, with the meaning strangled in it like any fly. And yet it was so pitifully plain that it *had* a meaning, though not the eyes of love, nor even those of deftest compositor (had such been there), could decipher it.

"I have it!" cried Ellen suddenly; and fleeing from the room, she returned at once with a worn and dog's-eared little volume. It was a relic of those so different days when she had been pupil-teacher at the village school under Slogan, and was in fact a spelling-book. She opened it at the alphabet, great A, great B, from which so many hisping little ones had learned their first lesson; and now she was to teach it once again to one in *second* childhood, upon the threshold of life, indeed, like them, but about to leave it. The rest stood round her keeping an anxious silence as she held the open book before her grandfather, and touched the letters slowly with the pencil one by one.

"When I come to the first letter of the thing you wish for, grandfather, dear," she had said, "you must close your eyes."

She had gone over half of them, and still, though his eyes had seemed to follow her every movement, they had given no sign.

"It is too much for him," whispered Mr. Waller to Stanhope; "I doubt whether he comprehends at all;" and indeed so Stanhope and the rest thought; but the faithful fingers pursued their task nevertheless to the end, or rather just short of the end, when they were rewarded, for at the letter W Anthony's eyelids dropped.

"Does the thing you wish for begin with W, grandfather?"

No placard, the most plainly printed that was ever stuck on wall, could have been read more easily than that earnest glance of his "Yes, yes."

Ellen had thus discovered, as it seemed, provided only that this new-born intelligence of the old man should last, a mode of interpretation for all his thoughts. But *would* it last? The Squire's brain had been quickened into activity by a circumstance, the precise nature of which only one person present could have indicated. Had it been awakened only to sink back again into torpor, since the incident that aroused it was not likely to recur? The sick man already appeared much fatigued, as, with his unaccustomed exertions, not to mention those hours of untranslated anxiety, he well might be, and it was evident that only by effort could he keep his attention fixed on the task before him, but he did do so, so far as to spell out the first four letters of his son's name—W, I, L, L—without which indication of his wishes they would certainly not have been guessed. Then his eyes closed, as though he had done enough for that day, and he sank back, as if exhausted.

Then a council was held as to whether or not William should be sent for: Mrs. Blackburn opining that he should be, since the Squire was so evidently desirous for reconciliation with him;

but the rest, unwilling to act in such direct contradiction to the doctor's orders, opposed this. Finally, it was resolved to await, at all events, the arrival of Mr. Allcase.

The surgeon positively declined to undertake the responsibility of disobeying his metropolitan chiefs. They had declared it to be their opinion that it would be highly dangerous, and might be even fatal to the patient, to permit access of the person who (whether willfully or not) had been the immediate cause of his seizure, and at whose approach he had since shown such evident marks of perturbation.

"But my husband has asked to see him," urged Mrs. Blackburn.

Mr. Allcase smiled blandly, and shook his head.

His practice was a general one, but had not included examination of the paralytic by alphabet. He had listened to the whole account—as he was accustomed to listen to the extraneous detail of the sick-room, unprofessional opinions, and new and miraculous methods of treatment—with good-natured incredulity.

"It is very natural in you, my dear madam, to imagine that Mr. Blackburn has expressed the wish in question; but in my opinion the whole affair is a delusion. He has not for three months been in a condition to entertain such a desire, much less to express it, although what you tell me of his attempting to write is very curious, very curious indeed. The brain may be active, but it is only mechanically so. Miss Ellen here is about to give him his cordial, which will put him, for the moment, at his best. Let her ask him, in my presence, whether he is of the same mind with respect to his son William; if he still wishes not to see him. If so, let him close his eyes, in token thereof, as you say it was understood he should do on the previous occasion.

Mrs. Blackburn was eager for this test; and the poor Squire being propped up as usual, while Ellen administered the potion, the question was put to him, as well as the proposed method of reply.

"Do you still wish not to see Uncle William, grandfather?"

The Squire closed his eyes and kept them fast, notwithstanding that quite a murmur of surprise broke forth from the womenfolk.

"There!" said the doctor, with quiet triumph; "did I not tell you so? My dear madam, it is folly to be annoyed by such an incident" (for the poor lady had turned very pale)—"these are not even the caprices of a sick man. Mr. Blackburn would have closed his eyes from very weakness, no matter what question you had proposed to him. For my part, I confess that at present I see no alteration in our poor patient. There is nothing for it, till some change occurs, but the same course of treatment—rest and quiet, quiet and rest: and you will forgive me if I hint—though it seems cruel to deprive one in his position of the society of a single friend—that there must not be too many people about him at a

time." And with that Mr. Allcase, who was a man of action, and would never have made a fortune in Mayfair, took his leave and proceeded as usual to make his report below stairs nominally to Mr. William, but in fact to Mr. Waller and Stanhope.

There is no trade in which the professional has so decided an advantage over the layman as in physic. Few can gainsay him: for intelligent men, who, masters of their own calling, are inclined to credit others with the same knowledge of their proper affairs, have often but slight acquaintance with the phenomena of the sick-room. Still, Mr. Allcase did not find his present audience so easy of conviction as the last. They stuck to it that the Squire had been in full possession of his wits, whatever might have been amiss with speech and movement, when he had spelled out the beginning of his son's name that morning.

"My good sir, we must believe the evidence of our own senses," urged Mr. Waller.

The surgeon's smile was pregnant with pity and good-nature.

"Why, you are worse than Gibbon, Mr. Allcase. You refuse to believe a miracle because it is contrary to your mere medical experience."

"I don't know to what precise circumstance you are referring, Mr. Waller; but I should say that Dr. Gibbon was right."

"Nay," added Stanhope; "why, one of the best scenes that Dumas ever wrote is where the paralytic old Noirtier, assisted by his granddaughter—just as it might be Mr. Blackburn and Miss Ellen—makes his will by merely winking his eyes."

"I don't suppose Mr. Dumas is a medical man," observed the surgeon dryly. "If the patient he describes had winked with one eye, and pointed over his left shoulder, I could have understood what was meant.—Good-morning, gentlemen, for I have no more time to spare for your experimental philosophy." And he mounted his cob, and rode away, as his custom was, at the gallop.

"There's a skeptic for you," observed Stanhope laughing: "and yet I suppose the man is right. He ought to know what he's talking about; and, besides, it appears that Mr. Blackburn did decline to see his son, by the same token that we took for—"

"My dear Stanhope, I've got it," interposed Mr. Waller gravely. "Allcase is a mere fanatic, with the *Pharmacopœia* for a Bible; but he is right thus far—that it is not his son whom Blackburn wishes to see. Perhaps I should never have hit upon it (although he spoke as plain as letters could speak, poor fellow), if it had not been for your chance allusion to Dumas. What the Squire wants to see is not William, but his WILL. Now, the question is—Where is it?"

CHAPTER XXVII.

THE NEST-EGG.

NOTWITHSTANDING Mr. Allcase's edict, both Mr. Waller and Stanhope found themselves once more in the sick-room that afternoon. Lucy had brought down a report that the Squire was looking about him in the same anxious, inquiring manner as before, and Stanhope was hardly less curious than Mr. Waller to see whether the latter's theory of the will was a correct one. It was a delicate subject to introduce at such a time and place, and was rendered more so by other circumstances. In the first place it was not pleasant to inquire of a sick man upon what, in all probability, was his death-bed, concerning that document at all; and, again, although any such idea was rendered impracticable by his condition, there was the idea of his wishing to effect some change in the disposition of his property. As his affection for Ellen seemed not only undiminished but on the increase, and as he manifestly did not desire even to see his son, this notion of change must needs be obnoxious, for her darling's sake, to Mrs. Blackburn; as, indeed, for other reasons, it would have been to Mr. Waller. What was, however, at the bottom of that gentleman's anxiety upon the subject was something that, at all events, testified to his sagacity, although like most men of his class, he was prone to err through over-subtlety. A first-rate whist-player, unless his nature is adaptive, often credits his adversary with too much finesse, and this was Mr. Waller's case. The truth flashed upon him at once that the Squire was anxious about the *safety* of his will, and although, of course, he did not know how seriously it was being endangered, he did not think that anxiety unreasonable. Perhaps he had hid it somewhere, as men often do, and was apprehensive that it would not be found after his death. Besides Mr. Waller's general sympathy with the interests of justice, which we have no reason to doubt, he was unwilling that this should be the case; for he had a notion in his mind, from what had dropped from the Squire, that in that document Mr. William was left a very considerable sum, *conditionally*—that is, in the event of his marrying one Lucy Waller. Now, although, if the Squire should die intestate, his son and heir would inherit infinitely more, he might then marry (almost in every sense) whom he pleased; and although he seemed so fond of Lucy, Mr. Waller's faith in the power of love was more limited than some of his commercial responsibilities. He preferred a material guaranty to an *entente cordiale*. In this he did his possible son-in-law wrong, for the strong will and animal nature of William Blackburn—if we may not say heart—were set upon Lucy; and the insuperability of the obstacle to his wishes only added to their vehemence.

On the other hand, Mr. Waller knew nothing of that game at hide-and-seek on which the young Squire had so long been engaged, and with which he still was busy. Whether Jen-

nings's lease was in the strong-box or not, we may fairly conclude that Mr. William had not worn that look of disappointment, on giving back the papers to his mother, for any reason connected with *that* document. The will, at all events, was not there; and where, in the Fiend's name, had the old man hidden it? Sometimes he tried to lay the flattering unction to his soul that his father had destroyed it, intending to make another, which his illness would now render impossible. But in less sanguine moments this seemed a slender hope indeed. It was contrary to his father's character to leave any thing to chance which could be made certain, and far less a matter like this, in which his prejudices were so deeply involved. It was far more likely, thought he, that the Squire, whose infamous suspicions of his own son had absolutely no bounds, had put it in some place of security, where it should only be found after his demise; either in the general search and overturn, or, still more probably, by some express direction that by word or writing he would leave behind him. Had such direction been left already, or not? Not a scrap of paper in desk or pigeon-hole with his father's hand-writing upon it had escaped Mr. William's prying eyes, and yet he had found no such key to the enigma; while, as to verbal instruction, none had certainly been left with the only two persons in whom he would have been likely to confide—namely, Mrs. Blackburn and Ellen. Mr. William had asked the question of his mother point blank; and she, in her turn, instigated by him, had interrogated her granddaughter. There was nothing that seemed to Ellen suspicious in such an inquiry; it was not unnatural that her uncle should wish to know whether his father had arranged his affairs, although at such a juncture it was not perhaps very delicate; but delicacy was not to be expected of Uncle William. At all events, she had answered frankly enough, that she knew nothing about the Squire's will—a matter, indeed, upon which, to do her justice, she thought less than any one in the house, not excepting even Lucy, to whom Mr. Waller's frequent speculations about it had made the subject familiar.

And now the question was, was it indeed about this document that old Anthony was so disquieted? Had what he had seen on the previous night—that rifling of his strong-box by his unconscious, or, at least, only half-guilty wife—shot so sharply to his core as to revive intelligence and stimulate paralysis itself to almost action? Had he watched her through the whole transaction, seen her take the papers forth, and guessed her errand better than she guessed it herself? Nay, had not her very excuse sharpened his suspicion, and guided it aright? He knew—if he was indeed conscious of any thing—that his son William was *not* anxious about Jennings's lease—was not at all likely to be looking “high and low” for *that*; and yet he he had evidence that he was in search of something, of which he was so earnestly desirous that

he had persuaded his mother to take a step discreditable in itself, and quite antagonistic to her loyal and faithful nature.

“Authority deserts the dying king,” but bitter must it be to the monarch who, though moribund, beholds it fleeing.

Was it possible that Anthony Blackburn, conscious of this disobedience, was haunted also by the apprehension that a certain decree, upon which his whole system of government had, as it were, been founded, was now in danger of being reversed? Lying in that living tomb of his, feelingless, motionless, senseless, save in eye and ear, was he instinctively aware, as he had been always instinctively suspicious, of that search and its intention, which, if successful, would render the scheme of his life fruitless, and make William Blackburn the heir of Redcombe Manor, and the inheritor of all? And if so, did not, at this thought, some thrill of horror, even through that numbed and shattered frame, make itself felt? One would indeed have said so, who, when Mr. Waller stooped over his pillow and whispered something in his ear, had read, as he read, the sick man's answer in his eyes; for it leaped out from them as in words of fire: Yes, yes, a thousand times yes; it *was* his will that he wished to have brought before him; and set in his sight, that he might have the safety of it assured.

The question was repeated to him aloud, that the others about him might hear, and there was not one of them—nor would have been, had even Mr. Allcase been among them—who entertained a doubt of the nature of his reiterated reply.

“And where *is* your will, grandfather?” inquired Ellen, holding the alphabet beneath his earnest gaze, and pointing to the letters as before.

That the task before him, simple as it seemed, was to the sick man a matter of toil and pain, was evident enough—almost as evident as the intensity of his desire to accomplish it. To collect his thoughts and concentrate them for ever so short a time, was irksome and difficult; and even to keep the weary lids from closing before each letter was reached, and to lift them after they had fallen, seemed to tax all his remaining energies. After all, it was but one word he did spell out, and that, as it seemed at first, without a meaning—PEDIGREE.

Mr. Waller and Stanhope glanced at each other significantly. Was the old man's mind, then, wandering still?

“It is a shame to trouble him,” sobbed Mrs. Blackburn; “you see he knows not what he wants.”

No voice replied to this observation, and the features of the sick man were sealed and shut. The watch upon the dressing-table seemed to tick as loud as the house clock upon the stairs; the idle whistle of Mr. William made itself heard from the floor below; otherwise all was silent.

“I am afraid Mrs. Blackburn is right,” whispered Stanhope gravely. “It is the ruling pas-

sion strong towards the last; he was always so proud of his pedigree, poor fellow!"

Mr. Waller shrugged his shoulders.

"Perhaps," said Ellen gently, "grandfather wishes to see the family tree, that hangs up in his little room."

Then the sealed eyes opened with a glance of rapturous content and gratitude, and rested upon her.

"Shall I go and fetch it?" said Stanhope. Mr. William was in the apartment indicated, and it had long become Stanhope's mission, and his alone, to deal with the young Squire. No other person cared to molest him, or come across him in any way, if it could be avoided; even Mr. Waller shunned him. His tactics, as we have already said, were too delicate to cope with so rough a customer. Not only diplomacy, but even the art of war was thrown away upon that savage young chieftain.

Mrs. Blackburn shook her head; it really seemed to her that there was something cruel in indulging these vagaries of her poor husband. He had not so irrevocably lost his wits that he should need to be thus humored like a madman.

Mr. Waller did not speak. In his opinion, there could not be the slightest connection between a "will" and a "pedigree," except in an imagination that had gone astray. It seemed to him indifferent whether the thing was sent for or not.

"If you don't mind, Mr. Stanhope, please to fetch it," said Ellen quietly.

He was gone in a moment, yet without noise, as all save one in that house had now accustomed themselves to move. Even if his steps could have been heard as he drew near the snugery, Mr. William's whistling would have drowned them. It was not often that he whistled, but all that afternoon he had been as blithe and loud as any blackbird; and the sound, striking upon the hush and silence above stairs, had jarred not a little upon his mother's ear.

"Hollo, Stanhope; glad to see you!" cried he. "You are come in the very nick of time. I was just wanting a game at billiards."

It was quite unusual to see the young Squire so buoyant and so affable. He had been striding up and down the room with his hands in his pockets for an hour or more, giving vent to his feelings in popular airs, and now some one had come to keep him company. "Have a cigar, old fellow?—How is the governor?"

"I am afraid your father is no better," replied Stanhope gravely. "We had hoped this morning he was getting more sensible, but I am now inclined to doubt it. He seems somehow to want to have that pedigree yonder brought up stairs."

"What! the family tree?" ejaculated the other, hastily stepping between it and his visitor. "Why, that's ridiculous. Besides, it's nailed into the wall, man. It's not meant to be moved at all."

"Nevertheless, since Mr. Blackburn has asked for it, I shall take it up stairs."

"But indeed you shall not. My father would be as sorry as any body, when he comes to himself, to find that pedigree hurt. Since he is not right in his wits, why not take the hunting map instead? He will never know it from the other, and then no mischief will be done. If it does not content him, you have only to take down the pedigree at last, don't you see?"

"Very well," said Stanhope reflectively; "there can be no harm in that. Only you need not show your temper so about such a trifle, my friend."

William Blackburn's face was indeed white with passion, and his hands trembled so that they could scarcely unhook the map from the nail on which it hung. It was impossible also to avoid remarking how eager he seemed to get rid of his visitor; making no rejoinder (with which he was generally ready enough) to his reproving words, and even opening the door for his exit.

"What is that pigeon-hole in the wall?" inquired Stanhope, lingering and pointing to a sort of niche by the fireplace which the removal of the hunting map had discovered.

"It's a place my uncle Charles had made to put his glass of grog into," said William readily. "He could take it so without going to the table, you see."

"Just so. But is there not a corresponding hole on the other side—underneath the pedigree?"

"I don't know; I have never looked."

"Then I will look," said Stanhope, fixing his eyes steadily upon the other.

"No, no. You will hurt it to lift it up; it is as bad as taking the whole thing down."

"Excuse me; that is not so, for somebody has already moved the bottom nails."

Stanhope could never explain why his suspicions, aroused by William's irritable manner, should have taken this especial direction; it was quite at hazard that he raised the frame on which the parchment was stretched, and put his hand cautiously within, as a boy feels the eggs in a nest.

"There is a pigeon-hole," said he, "and there is something in it."

"It is a plan of the estate, which my father keeps there," said William hastily.

"I thought you said you did not know there was such a hole. Here's the plan as you say; but there is something else.—By Jove! I believe it is the will itself, and that the Squire was right, after all."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

ANTHONY MAKES HIS CHOICE.

Yes, the Squire was right. From the mere association of ideas, perhaps, or because it really seemed as safe a place of concealment as any in the house, he had hidden his will behind the family tree; and it had been only that very day, nay, within a few hours, and by the merest accident, that William had found it there. If he

had only taken it and put it somewhere else, as he would now have done, could Stanhope even for a minute have been got out of the room; or if at first he had thrown it behind the fire, as he had thought of doing, but had been afraid to do; or if this meddlesome fellow, that he had always thought he hated, but whom, by comparison with his present vehemence of abhorrence, he must have almost liked, had not come hither upon his fool's errand!

These bitter and vain regrets—the knowledge of what he might have gained, and of what he now might lose—came in upon William Blackburn, wave after wave, and well nigh choked him. But he was not going to throw up his hand and forfeit such a stake while there was a card left to play. If Stanhope should once make certain it was the will, the destruction of it hereafter would be a perilous risk indeed; but at present he had only expressed an expectation of it, which was, however, also a suspicion; for he kept the hand that held the document behind him, just as though he thought a snatch might have been made at it—which without doubt he did.

"I don't know what that paper is of which you have possessed yourself," observed William doggedly, "but I know that it is of a private nature—something my father does not wish to be fingered and pryed into by strangers such as you: I know that."

"Your sense of delicacy is more acute than I should have given you credit for," rejoined Stanhope coolly; "but it is in this case unnecessarily alarmed. I am about to carry this document, which, as I believe, is the one he has been asking for, to your father himself."

"The one he has been asking for?—and he without speech or motion? No, sir; I can not permit this outrage, and I will not. You have taken upon yourself already more than most men would have stood in their own house; but there are limits, you must understand."

"I am doing nothing of myself, Mr. Blackburn," said the other composedly, "but only obeying, I do assure you, your sick father. He has contrived, by Miss Ellen's help, to make his wishes known."

"By Miss Ellen's help! Yes, you and smooth Miss Ellen would grasp all. Oh, I know you both!"

"You can not put me in a passion, sir, just now; but if I had any doubt whether this thing here was your father's will or not, your conduct has resolved it.—Am I to understand, by your standing with your back against that door, that you refuse to let me pass?"

"I do: I will."

"You have an ugly look, William Blackburn, and you are feeling in your pocket for your knife; but I am not so much in love with life as to keep it at the price of the fear of a man like you. Nay, if you were fifty men with fifty knives, it would be all the same."

"Ah! you say so."

"And I mean it too."

"And I mean something, Herbert Stanhope. I am a desperate man."

"I well know that. I have not forgotten, though I have not repeated it, the word I heard your father speak in this same room, when I came in at yonder window. He called you 'Murderer.'—You smile contemptuously, and, indeed, I well believe that you never committed murder. But you have within you what goes to make a man-slayer. You are thinking even now—not, 'Shall I stab this man if he comes on?' but, 'Shall I hang for it?'"

"Now, look you," said William, with his hands outspread, at least as much to show they had no weapon as to fit his words with their appropriate action, "there is no need to fight about the matter. The case is simply this: I do not credit what you say. I decline to believe that my father wishes to deliver his most private papers into your custody, unless I have some better warranty. Put that thing back, and fetch my mother, and I will abide by what she says."

"I agree to that—at least," added Stanhope, seeing a gleam of triumph in the other's face, "you must fetch her, for I will not part with this, or leave you alone with it, for a single second. I see now why your father wants to have it in his own keeping, safe from accidents; a will, under certain circumstances, being like a child that must not be left in a room with a fire in it."

Mr. William answered nothing to this insinuation, which, perhaps, as a vile personality, he knew how to despise; but, throwing the door open, he called "Mother, mother!" in a loud and angry voice.

Mrs. Blackburn came down-stairs with finger on her lip. "Hush, hush!" she whispered; "your father is dozing again, Willy; I have sent them all away but Ellen."

"Is it your wish, mother, that Mr. Stanhope here should take my place in this house, even to the guardianship of my father's private papers?"

"Nay, Mrs. Blackburn," interposed the other, "that is not the point at issue. Your husband has desired, as you know, to have brought to him a certain document—"

"Yes, yes; the pedigree yonder.—That is quite right, Willy, dear. But it can wait, for I am sure that, more than pedigree or any thing, he needs just now rest."

"The pedigree—do you hear?" cried William exultingly. "Yet this man would have persuaded me it was something else my father wanted—something that he holds in his hand behind him, look you, like a thief."

"Yes, madam it is your husband's will," said Stanhope with dignity. "I will willingly commit it to your charge, to be taken up to him straightway, while your son stops here."

"But not if Ellen is there," said William obstinately. "She would stick at nothing—she and those who abet her.—Do you keep it, mother; that, I suppose will satisfy even this gentleman."

"Dear Mrs. Blackburn," said Stanhope with

respectful earnestness, "whatever pain this most unseemly discussion causes you, believe me it is none of my seeking. You know as well as I do what your husband has been so anxious to possess; well, I have got it here. Let himself decide into whose keeping he will have it placed. Do you inquire of him, since Mr. William here distrusts his niece—"

"And as Mr. Stanhope here distrusts *you*, mother," interrupted William.

"That is not true, sir, as you are well aware," said Stanhope firmly. "I have the utmost regard for Mrs. Blackburn; yet I am prepared in this matter to stand under her misjudgment, and even her displeasure. As for you, sir, you well know what I could say, and what I have left unsaid, with respect to your mother and your influence over her; and unless upon your father's express commandment, I will *not* give up the will."

"Dear me, dear me," cried Mrs. Blackburn, looking from one to the other in much perplexity. "What a caddle is this all about a piece of paper! As to making my poor husband understand with the alphabet and things, it is only Ellen who can do it."

"And I'm not going to trust to Miss Ellen's version of the matter," said William doggedly.

"Pardon me, Mrs. Blackburn," observed Stanhope, "but if you will kindly come up with me I am sure that I can make plain to you your husband's wishes, Miss Ellen need not be there at all.—Come, sir; you may surely intrust yourself and your interests to your mother's hands."

Mr. William was understood to allow this much, though not without a growl or two of objection; he saw Stanhope was not to be moved.

"I suppose this story will be all over the place to-morrow?" said he surlily; "our family affairs being public property."

"Nay, Willy," exclaimed Mrs. Blackburn: "I am sure you do Mr. Stanhope wrong: whatever unhappy differences may exist between your father and you, I am convinced this gentleman has never helped to spread them, and will not do so now."

"Indeed, madam, you are right," said Stanhope haughtily; "I am no tale-bearer; and as for this particular affair, the sequel, however it may chance to end, shall never pass my lips."

"That looks fair enough," assented William, in his niggard fashion.—"Now, do you get Miss Ellen away, mother, and let us know what is father's fancy about this will—unless, as is most likely, he has forgotten all about it in the mean time."

Then Mrs. Blackburn went up stairs, to insist upon taking Ellen's place in the sick-room, as she had often done before, while her granddaughter took exercise or recreation with Lucy.

"There now, you have got it your own way, Stanhope," said William Blackburn, as soon as they were alone. "So mind and hold your tongue, whatever happens. And I *say*, I hope you'll behave honorable, and give a fellow a

chance. Just put it to the governor whether it isn't only right and fair that his son should have the keeping of his papers and things, and not any body else. And don't suggest Waller's name, nor Moffat's—do you understand? Because, you see, I shan't be there to look after my own interests."

"I will represent the matter as you wish," said Stanhope quietly. "I have no other aim than to have justice done; but your father can not be troubled by much talking; he can scarcely keep his attention even to one thing."

The door was gently opened, and Mrs. Blackburn appeared, with beckoning finger. "He is alone," whispered she, "and awake. I have sent Ellen away, and you must not let her hear you come up stairs."

Stanhope nodded, and followed his hostess to the sick-room, which they entered softly, leaving the door ajar.

"I have brought you, Mr. Blackburn, what I believe you have been inquiring for," said Stanhope, seating himself by the pillow, and speaking in low but very distinct tones. "Is not this your will?"

A look of grateful pleasure overspread the worn, white features, and the joyful eyes glanced from Stanhope's face to the paper which he held in his hand, and back again with earnest approval.

"Why, he wants you to read it, Mr. Stanhope, that's what he wants!" exclaimed Mrs. Blackburn involuntarily.

Such was without doubt the sick man's wish, as Stanhope saw, but he only smiled and shook his head. "No, sir," said he softly, "I will not read it; but I am come here to place it in whomsoever's hands you may please to wish."

Again the eyes glanced earnestly from the will to Stanhope, from Stanhope to the will.

"He wishes *you* to keep it, Mr. Heybert," said Mrs. Blackburn sighing; "and I am sure, although I might have wished his confidence to be placed elsewhere, there can be no objection."

"There are three other persons who have a more natural right to such a trust," said Stanhope, "and it is only proper that this should be made plain."

"Do not mention my poor Willy," sobbed Mrs. Blackburn; "it is no use, I know: I am quite content that you should keep it. And oh, it puts him out so to speak of Willy."

But Stanhope, mindful of his promise, went on unmoved: "There is your wife, sir—your true and tender wife—would you not wish that she should keep the will?"

The Squire's eyes shut fast. You might have thought he was a man laid out for dead.

"There, sir, you see it's no use. He does not wish me to have it," sighed the old lady. "And yet you might have trusted *me*, dear Anthony."

The Squire looked at her, tenderly enough, and even gratefully; so much so, that once more the question was put: "Do you wish your wife to keep it?"

"No; most certainly, no."

"And Miss Ellen, sir? Would you not wish your granddaughter to have the keeping of it?"

For one instant, there was indecision—a mere quivering of the eyelids; but the next, they were shut close and rigid as before.

"No, not Ellen."

"Oh, why do you trouble him thus, and torture me, dear Mr. Stanhope? I know that he means you to keep the will."

"Nevertheless, dear Mrs. Blackburn, I must put one more question."

"There is another person yet, sir, to be mentioned, who has a stronger claim than any to your confidence. I beg of you to put aside all bitter memories in answering now; to forget the past, and, so far as it is possible, to be hopeful of the future. Do you wish this paper to be taken charge of by your son, William Blackburn?"

The eyes did not close now; they opened wide; they shot—each glance was an arrow tipped with flame—unspeakable disgust and horror.

"Oh, but this is terrible!" cried Mrs. Blackburn. "Great Heaven! what is it that he sees?" She turned her gaze, whither Stanhope's was already turned, to the wall opposite the foot of the bed, on which had been hung a mirror, so that the sick man should have the windows' out-door sights presented to him. The home-lying fields, that he was never to tread again, the flying clouds, the life and motion of the flocks and herds, were dear, it was thought, to him, chained to his pillow.

"I see nothing, Mr. Stanhope. Do you?"

"No, madam; nothing."

"Then, pray, put no more questions to dear Anthony, for you see they have half driven him wild; and take away that dreadful paper, and send Ellen. He is quiet again now, thank God."

Stanhope had seen something, though but for a moment's space. Besides the window, was mirrored in the same glass the door, and at it, half opened, he had caught William's prying face, there, doubtless to see that faith was kept with him. One glance, such as we have seen, had Anthony bestowed upon his son, and then the latter had turned and fled down stairs, noiseless, with stocking feet. So haggard and awestricken had been his answering glance, that Stanhope felt a sort of pity for this wretched spy, thus shamefully detected. The thought flashed through him: "Bad as the fellow is, may not his father have judged him somewhat too harshly, to cast at him, from what may be his deathbed, such aversion and distrust as this? And was there not something in William's sullen face, which, though not innocence, seemed really to be a sense of wrong?" As for the base suspicion of himself, implied by the espial, that was only natural to such a man, and Stanhope determined not to tax him with it. The will was safe in his own keeping, and so far he could afford to be generous to the other, foiled.

"Well, and who is to have it?" inquired

William presently in the room below, with a would-be air of curiosity, as though he had not already received his answer at first hand, and yet with a certain spite in his tone that belied it. "Not me, I'll warrant."

"No, sir; as Mrs. Blackburn will inform you, if my word is not sufficient. Your father has requested me to take charge of this document; and you may depend upon it," he added, with a significant glance, "that this time it will be put out of harm's way."

CHAPTER XXIX.

MRS. BLACKBURN SEES A GHOST.

THE winter was over and gone, and still the great Blackburn vault remained without the prey for which, in all men's eyes, it seemed to have yawned so long. The Squire was yet alive; and even, as the wise doctors said, who had come again from town to visit him, better—at all events less restless and discomposed. They had recommended change of air—removal to some convenient distance; and it was in contemplation, when the days grew warmer, to transport the invalid to that sheltered cottage on the Curlew of which we have already spoken. There was no more chance of his recovery than of Fisherman Richard, who had built the place, coming back to claim his own again. But there was so far an improvement in the sick man's state, that it was now wholly passive; there were no more yearning glances, dumb appeals. He had never suffered bodily pain, and now his mind seemed still and quiet as his limbs.

None but his wife and son, and Stanhope, guessed the cause. Even Ellen, seeing his eyes often fixed upon the pedigree (which had been transferred from the old place to his chamber-wall), believed that it was that which so contented him. He saw the seasons change in the great mirror—the snow dissolve, the green appear; the awakening life of bud and branch—but without pain or pleasure. He watched the familiar faces about his bed with the same listless look as he gazed on the motes in the sunbeams.

Heaven only knows what he thought. We who live and move can scarcely picture how looks the world to those who only have their being in it.

The outside folk—his friends and neighbors—did not speculate upon that matter, but counted him for dead already, except that they did not call upon the family with "kind inquiries." Even to those about him it sometimes seemed so. The prayers which Ellen never omitted to read to him, night and morning, fell on deaf ears, and might have been the service for the dead.

William, though he well knew he was not the heir, began to exercise the rights of heirship, and rode and strode about his father's lands as though they were his own; and wheth-

er he rode or strode, "a beggar on horseback" was what the people called him. Mere power, such as is neither influence nor authority, was very sweet to him, as it is to all brutal natures; and he misused it sorely. And yet it angered him to know that he was hated. He was jealous of the respectful salutations with which Ellen was welcomed by the meanest hind, as she passed by; although all the village, and the poorest most of all, had cause to like her, as he knew, and more or less had cause to dislike him. He was jealous of the kindness with which Stanhope was universally regarded, notwithstanding that the young Squire of Curlew Hall had not the means to "do his duty by the land," that is, by those who live by it. He was jealous of the cheery looks which Mr. Waller, always chatty, always gay, inspired. He was jealous, even though his rival in her affections was in the grave, with respect to Lucy; and had had the meanness, on some pretense, to get dismissed a gardener whom he had overheard talking to her about "young Squire Richard as was dead and gone." He hated the county generally, partly because his presence in the hunting-field had not been received with enthusiasm by the other red-coats, and partly because he had not been made a magistrate. The Blackburns had always been put upon the bench as soon as they were of legal age, and his father had had that responsibility conferred upon him directly he had succeeded to his inheritance. Why, then, was he left out in the cold? The cabal against him, it seemed, had not been confined to his own home.

It was curious how this denial of the mere insignia of respectability—since for the thing itself he cared nothing—ranked in his mind. In reality, only there is nothing so unreasonable as intense selfishness, William Blackburn had had every opportunity of "getting on" in the neighborhood afforded him. Country folk are the last to judge men of their own class upon their own merits, or he would have had small chance indeed; scores of welcoming hands had been held out to him; but in return he had only shown the cloven foot. His behavior to his parents, and especially to Lucy, was resented; and besides, notwithstanding the shortness of his sojourn at Redcombe, he had openly, more than once, shocked a by no means fastidious public opinion. As to the magistracy, Stanhope, though the lord-lieutenant was personally known to him, had declined point blank to move in the matter, and had even expressed himself to be, "under the circumstances, astonished at such a request." Mr. Waller (who would himself perhaps have found a difficulty in getting J. P. tacked to his name, had not M. P. been there already) had recommended patience, and hinted that there would be a better chance of such promotion when he had formed some matrimonial connection with a county family; at which William's brow darkened visibly, for reasons best known to himself. He had received a letter on the very morning on

which that remark was made, and had it then in his pocket, which, besides its intrinsically unpleasant nature, reminded him bitterly enough of how far off was that consummation of his hopes, his marriage with Lucy Waller. This communication ran as follows:

"MY DEAR MR. BLACKBURN.—I dare say you will scarcely remember this handwriting; and yet it comes from one who is a sort of kin to you" [here Mr. William winced and swore a great oath]. "Some men might take it ill that you never wrote a line to tell me of my poor niece's death; but it is likely enough, not being an habitual correspondent of yours truly, you did not know my address, which indeed is generally pretty changeable, as at present. If I had chanced to see the notice in the *Times*, I should certainly have come, no matter what distance, to pay my last tribute of respect to your late wife's memory" [here Mr. William expressed incredulity in the strongest language]. "However, as business is bringing me northward shortly, I will do myself the pleasure of just looking in at Blackburn Manor. It was only quite by chance, and within the last day or two, I heard of your *luck*. What a pity it is poor Bess never lived to see it! Richardson also joins with me in felicitations" [never did "felicitated" man wear so incongruous a look as William Blackburn wore as he read that word] upon your position and *prospects*. Still, you must not forget old friends.—Yours very sincerely,
JOHN DEAN."

This unwelcome letter was no doubt intentionally unfurnished with an address, so that Mr. William Blackburn was unable to indulge himself in what would have been an immense relief under the circumstances, the sending an appropriate reply by return of post. "He wants money, this impudent scoundrel," ejaculated William. "He and Richardson, they think to put the screw on, on account of that confounded Chester business. But not one penny of hush-money do they get out of me. I had rather they told the whole story than not, indeed, for it would set me free of this fellow Stanhope; he would have no hold upon me then, except that—curse him!—he has got that will in keeping. He took it to Curlew Hall that very day, I know he did. Yes, I must not break with him—just yet—whatever happens.—But why does this fellow prate so much about Bess? He uses her as a stalking-horse, of course. He dared not show his face here but for that. And yet it is clear he suspects nothing. If he only *knew*—why this man would be a stone about my neck for all my days. I must see him, I suppose, since I can not prevent his coming. But I will not give him a shilling, not a sixpence—let him do his worst. I believe if he told all, that Waller is so deeply dipped, that it would make no difference now as regards Lucy. But what is her father's consent, or even hers, to me" (and

William Blackburn ground his teeth), "while there is that woman at Formosa!"

It was in vain for him to recapitulate what an out-of-the-way place Formosa was, and all the arguments he had so often used with himself against the probability of Bess turning up to trouble him. The very thought of the risk he should incur, if he married while she was alive, brought the perspiration out upon his forehead.

It may be judged whether this was a propitious morning for Mr. Waller to hint to the young Squire that an eligible matrimonial connection was the only thing to set himself right with the county and the lord-lieutenant.

Another annoyance chanced to arise that day from the same source, although of a very different and quite unsubstantial kind; but then annoyances are often irksome in inverse proportion to their substance. Just as he had contrived to put that letter of Uncle Dean, with the bitter recollections it evoked, out of his mind, his mother, of all people in the world, must needs awaken them again. She had driven out with Lucy to "The Fishery," to give certain final directions there for the reception of the family, and had come back, to use her own expression, "much upset;" by which she meant, not that she had been frequently thrown out of the carriage, but was seriously indisposed. Perhaps, as Lucy suggested to Ellen, the idea of leaving Redcombe under such sad circumstances, since it was out of all human probability that her husband would be brought back thither—save to the churchyard—had overcome her; she had borne up wonderfully all day, however, until on their road home, when she had given way in a rather unexpected and apparently uncalled-for manner in Redmoor fir-grove—"Just where it is so steep, you know, that one always gets out and walks; your grandmother and I were walking, and she bade me go on at my own pace, since waiting for her made her nervous; and although loath to leave her, I did so; but finding she did not appear within a reasonable time, and since the coachman feared that the horses, being heated, would catch cold waiting too long on the brow of the hill, I went back, to give Mrs. Blackburn my arm to help her up the steep. I found her leaning against a tree, not out of breath, but very pale and trembling, and she said something had given her a turn."

"Ah, then I know what it was, Lucy," interrupted Ellen sadly; "I can guess why that particular place should affect poor dear grandmother: it was in that very fir-grove, as she once told me, that she and grandfather had a last interview with his mother. He was but a few weeks married, then a young and handsome bridegroom; and I dare say the sudden recollection of him as he then was, involuntarily contrasted itself in her mind with his present woeful condition."

"I think that must have been it," assented Lucy, "for she said something, I could not quite understand, about a warning and your poor

grandfather. I am sure it is a miracle to me that Mrs. Blackburn gives way so seldom, considering her trials."

Indeed, the stout old lady, notwithstanding that tenderness of her heart which evinced itself in such culpable weakness with respect to her son, was by no means easily cast down, but went about her household duties bravely, and nursed the sick man in true wifely fashion night and day, the only one about him who in her heart of hearts had had even until now some hope of him yet. She was one of those who have faith in the doctor while he prophesies smooth things, but, when he shakes his head, who comfort themselves with a "Well, well, science is often mistaken, and after all we are in God's hands;" as though we had not been there before. But all that evening good Mrs. Blackburn kept sorrowful silence, and more than once considerably embarrassed Mr. Waller by bursting into tears. To weep in public was, in that gentleman's eyes, an unpardonable solecism ("Good heavens," whispered he to Stanhope on the second occasion of this ebullition, "are we in the Forest of Bondy?"), an impulse which, if generally indulged in, would make the ordinary transactions of life impossible: the idea of some meeting of ruined shareholders, instead of stigmatizing one as a scoundrel (against which one might bear up), dissolving into tears! As to Mr. William, full of his own personal troubles, he doubtless wondered what the old woman had got to cry about; but sympathy did not prompt him so far as to make inquiry. He had got his greatcoat on, and his cigar in his mouth, about to visit the *Blackburn Arms* as usual after dinner, when his mother beckoned him into the deserted dining-room.

"Oh, Willy," said she, "I have been wanting to speak to you all the evening, but could not get you alone. I have had such a shock to-day as you can not imagine; and I am only thankful that it did not happen to you."

"Shock; well, I'm not easily shocked, and I dare say I could have stood it," returned William gruffly. "What's happened now?"

"A very dreadful thing, Willy. I have had a message from the grave. I have seen a ghost."

"Oh, I say; come now. You must have a talk with Mr. Allcase when he comes to visit the governor to-morrow. These sort of fancies—for I've heard him say so—are all stomach."

"But this was not fancy, William, I am very sure. Now, do you sit down and listen."

"But I want a cigar, mother; and Bill Dykes and Harry Willing have got a match on to-night at four corners."

"Never mind *them*, William," returned Mrs. Blackburn gravely; "and have your cigar here, if you please. If you had seen what I have seen this day, you would be in no humor for games or smoking."

"I will just light up, however, in the mean time," said Mr. William contemptuously, for he had drunk his fill, and was by no means in a

condition favorable to superstitious fears.—“Now, then, I'm all attention; fire away.”

“I dare say you have heard, Willy,” began his mother slowly, with her hand upon his knee, “of that old legend about the Blackburn folk, that before they die they have each a warning of their end sent from the other world—that the last dead Blackburn returns to tell the doomed one of his race that his time has come to depart also.”

“I have heard some twaddle of the kind,” said William carelessly. “They say in the village that young Richard's dead mother was seen in the park the night before her son popped off the hooks so suddenly; but it's all rubbish, of course. And indeed she did not happen to be a Blackburn at all.”

“That is no matter, Willy; she was a Blackburn by marriage, if not by blood. Your grandmother walked on the terrace the night before her wicked husband breathed his last. It is always the last dead that gives the warning.”

Mr. William, lying back in his arm-chair at ease, expelled his tobacco-smoke in rings, an accomplishment of which he was unreasonably proud, and inquired scornfully: “Well, what then? Have you seen this young gentleman to-day?” and he pointed to the picture of his cousin Richard that hung above the mantel-piece.

“No, Willy; but I have seen your wife—poor Bess.”

William Blackburn bounded from his chair with a fearful oath.

“Don't swear, Willy—don't swear, for Heaven's sake; you don't know how soon you may be called to answer for such words. What I saw was a warning for one of your race; but who shall say for whom? At first, of course, I only thought of your poor father. He is the likeliest to go, dear soul, and the fittest for it. Ah, if you could but see him lying day and night, night and day, patient and gentle-faced as the stone angel over the church door! I know by his look that he has forgiven me for meddling with his papers, though, indeed, it was very wrong of me to do so; and I do think if you were to go and see him once again, Willy—”

“Never you mind me and father. You tell me about what you saw, mother; tell me every thing.” He had sat down again now, and had hidden his eyes behind his hand, but his features worked behind it restlessly.

“I knew it would move you, my dear boy—I knew it would touch you; and I hope it will work for good. I know you are not wicked as some believe, but only a little wild and thoughtless. Yet, oh, remember, that it is not always the old and ailing that are taken first, but oftentimes the young and strong. Think, if this should be a warning sent to you, my darling—to you, instead of—”

“Will you tell me what you saw?” broke in her son with savage impatience. “That first, and what you think of it afterwards. What, in the Fiend's name, did you see, mother?”

For a moment the poor lady's speech was choked by sobs. For the first time, perhaps, it

was borne home to her that this son of hers had indeed a heart of stone; but he muttered something by way of an apology for his tone and temper; he had been put out, he said, by an infernal business-letter that morning. And her hand once more rested on his knee as she resumed her story.

“We were walking—Lucy and I—up the short cut through Redmoor fir-grove, while the carriage went up the road. I had sent Lucy on before, because I like to go my own pace, and not feel hurried; and presently she had left me far behind and I was quite alone. It was the very place where, fifty years ago, Willy, your father and I met Russel Blackburn's wife for the last time, and the thoughts of old times crowded in upon me, so that I stopped and lingered more than I needed to do, though the way was steep.”

“You had your mind, then, full of the past, and death, and such-like?” observed William, with interest.

“No doubt, Willy; and I may have also even thought of Bess herself, as I certainly did of you, dear boy. But if I did, I thought of her less than any. Then presently, in the silence of the grove—for you know there was not a breath of wind to-day—I heard steps behind me. I was not surprised, for the path is used by all folks on foot coming from Mosedale to Redcombe, nor in the least degree agitated or alarmed. As the steps grew nearer, I moved to one side of the path in order to let the person pass me, for whoever it was, she was a faster walker than I.”

“But how did you know it was a woman?”

“Because I heard her dress brush against the trees.”

“She was so close as that, was she?” inquired William, hoarsely.

“She was at one time, but not when I looked round. I walked on and on, expecting every instant that she would pass me; but finding that the footsteps ceased, I turned about to see why she had stopped.”

“Well, and what then?”

“Then I saw that it was Bess. It was growing dusk, but I am certain that it was she, and no other. She was a deal older, and more white and wan-looking than when I saw her last: but, as sure as it is my voice you hear, Willy, it was your dead wife.”

“Did you speak to her?” As William put this question, he shot through his fingers an eager glance at his mother's face: it was a careworn and wrinkled one enough, but as honest and open as the smoothest: he need not have been afraid of any concealment there.

“Speak to her? No, indeed, Willy. I was much too skeared. My limbs seemed to give way, and I sank down trembling all of a heap against a tree-trunk. Indeed, for a moment, I shut my eyes for fear, yet not so long that if it had been any thing but a ghost, it could never have got out of sight; and yet, when I looked again, Willy, there was nothing there.”

“No: and there never was any thing there,

mother," said William, forcing a laugh, "you may take your oath of that."

"I tell you, Willy," answered Mrs. Blackburn solemnly, "I am not more certain that I see you now than that I saw Bess to-day. Moreover, she saw me, for which, indeed, without doubt, she had been sent. Oh, Willy, Willy, I can't keep the terrible thought out of my mind that it was about you she came. It seems so strange else that she should have looked so wan and sorrowful about your father. Oh, repent, my darling, for we have all something to be sorry for, and be a good lad while you have yet time. I have never troubled you with such talk of late, Willy: I have been afraid of your ill-looks and your tempers, but it has been often in my thoughts to speak of such things.—Kiss me, darling, kiss me. Pray to-night. Oh, how I have prayed for you, Willy! Pray to be a good man."

"Yes, yes, all right," said Mr. William, submitting, if with no very good grace, to his mother's impassioned caress. "I will do all that if you on your part will promise me to hold your tongue about this matter. In my opinion, you have been misled by your feelings; you were tired and full of melancholy thoughts, and your imagination has built up the whole affair. It was a mere delusion."

Mrs. Blackburn shook her head, and smiled sadly.

"Well, that's my opinion, I repeat," said William coldly; "and I think most people will agree with me. On the other hand, you think you have seen a ghost. In either case, I judge the thing had better not be talked about. You never said one word of this to Lucy or Ellen, of course?"

"Not a syllable, Willy: and I never shall. This is a secret between you and me—a secret much too sacred, much too awful, to speak to any ear than that which it may concern. Your father, alas! is deaf to every voice, even though it be one from the tomb; but you, Willy, oh, lay it to heart—lay it to heart! You will not go out to-night, darling, among those rough, rude men?"

"No, I will not. I promise you that, mother. Good-night. I will just have another cigar, and then to bed."

But William Blackburn remained in that room for hours, now sitting by the fading embers with moody brow, now starting up to pace the floor with restless steps. Not till the morning light found its way through the closed shutters did he retire to his own chamber; yet after all this counsel with himself, he could come to no more satisfactory conclusion than to hope that all these pains of thought might be in vain. "The old woman must have been deceived," he muttered, as he threw himself on his bed. "It could never have been Bess herself; she would not have dared to come."

CHAPTER XXX.

MR. WILLIAM ENJOYS SOCIETY.

THAT heaviness may endure for a night, but joy cometh in the morning, was certainly not written of the vicious. To them the beginning of the day more than any other time brings the reproof of Nature. It is then that she chiefly resents upon the wrong-doer his contravention of her laws, and, until he has commenced his daily round of life, hidden himself from her among his base companions, or forgotten her in strong liquors, her presence is irksome and hateful. It was at breakfast of all meals that Mr. William Blackburn appeared to least advantage; and on the morning succeeding his long vigil, he was a piteous sight to behold. Mrs. Blackburn regarded him with unfeigned terror, as she thought of that mysterious vision of the previous day, and what it might portend.

"I shall be glad indeed," said she, seeing him heap this and that upon his plate, until it was like the "Douglas larder," and yet scarcely swallow a mouthful, "when the time is ripe for our going to the cottage, for your sake, Willy, almost as much as for that of your poor father. I am sure you want change of air."

"I don't know whether I shall go to the cottage at all," answered her son gruffly; "and at all events, I sha'n't go yet."

"Not go, Willy?" pleaded she. "Why, you surely would not stop here alone?—What can you have to keep you at Redcombe?"

"Something that women understand nothing about," growled he—"business." And with that scanty information she was fain to be content.

It was certainly a business of a light kind, and one that did not keep Mr. William within doors. It was his habit to lounge about the grounds, and park, and village all day, the very type of a loafer. But he now confined himself to the grounds only. Instead of his old listless look, his eye seemed ever on the watch, his ear upon the stretch, for some one coming; he would break off suddenly in his speech to listen to sounds that heralded nothing, to stare with eager looks into the distance, where nothing showed itself. He was alert, and yet distraught. Doubtless, unwilling, for good reasons, to be from home upon Mr. Dean's arrival, which would probably occur at some reasonably early hour, he was awaiting that gentleman's visit; for when the dusk began to thicken, he would set out none knew whither, but for such a distance—and it was observed that his steps always took the direction of Mosedale—as often brought him home long after dinner was finished. On one occasion, being later than ever, his mother ventured to remonstrate with him: "You should consider, dearest Willy, there are guests in the house, and your poor father is not here to do the honors. I do not like to see Mr. Waller sitting opposite to me instead of my boy."

"Very well, mother," said he, "it shall not occur again."

In spite of herself, Mrs. Blackburn could not but feel amazed at her son's ready obedience. His tone, if not tender, which perhaps it could not be, for voices lose their tenderness through long disuse, was not rough, but hollow and nervous. His face was deadly pale, and his brow damp, and his whole appearance showed that he had been walking far and fast.

"How ill and tired you look, Willy; you over-fatigue yourself; and do make haste to change your things, for see, your boots and leg-gings are quite wet."

"I came through the furze, and it was heavy with dew," said he, "that's all."

"But how hungry you must be, darling. I will bring my knitting and sit with you while you eat."

"Yes, do, mother," said he. It was almost the first time he had expressed a desire for her company, and the poor lady was in raptures. At the same time, this change in his behavior, which had during the last few days been even unusually brusque and surly, really alarmed her. It struck her that he must surely be ill. The apprehension of the warning vision having had reference to him, recurred to her with redoubled vehemence, for, curiously enough, it had never even entered into her mind that it might be Ellen's life that was imperilled. She had had his favorite viands kept in readiness for him, but he ate scarcely any thing, though he drank freely; and this did not tend to make her less anxious. Yet she did not dare to recur directly to that subject for which he had shown a particular distaste.

"Mr. Allcase called while you were away, Willy, and he thinks the weather is now quite mild enough for us to leave home; and Mr. Waller tells me that the Fishery is looking so bright and comfortable, with every thing ready for our reception."

William laid down his knife and fork. "Has Mr. Waller been over yonder to-day?" asked he earnestly.

"Yes, darling; he had business in Mosedale this afternoon, and so, very kindly, he rode over to see how things were looking at the cottage."

"When did he go? when did he come back? I mean, at what hour?"

"He started after luncheon, and he was home again by six at latest, my dear. I wonder you saw nothing of him upon the moor."

"I did not go to the moor to-day: I walked in the opposite direction.—How is father?"

"Well, no worse, at all events. Mr. Allcase says he can quite bear the journey, and oh, dear Willy, I do so hope you will go with us. There will be the fishing, you know; and though there is no billiard-room, Mosedale is quite close; and Lucy and Mr. Waller will be almost as much with us there as they are now, although we have no sleeping-room for them in the cottage. Mr. Stanhope, too, has kindly promised to stay on with us. I don't think you need be very dull there. Come, dear, it is not often

that I ask a favor of you, but for *my* sake, if not for your own—and I am sure you need the change—do promise me to go with *us* to the Fishery."

"Very well, mother; I will go with you, since you make such a point of it."

"You good, dear boy, you have no idea how happy you make me!" murmured Mrs. Blackburn, with dim eyes. "And now I will leave you to have your cigar in peace upon the terrace."

"No; I shall not go out again to-night; I have been out enough.—Where are Waller and Stanhope?"

"They are not in the smoking-room, so that you can have it all to yourself, dear. They are playing a game of billiards."

These two gentlemen were wont to have their cigars together in the Squire's sanctum, unhonored by Mr. William's presence, who found companions more suited to his nature in the saddle-room or at the public-house. But on this occasion, notwithstanding that he might have had the little room all to himself, he joined their company, and even volunteered to keep their score for them; this he did as usual, with the rest; and the way in which that instrument rapped against the marking-board, through the trembling of his hands, made the two players look at one another significantly: the one remarked in a whisper "that their friend was like the Cock Lane ghost;" and the other, under cover of a canon, expressed his belief that they were going to have D. T. in the house again before very long. When invited to play himself, Mr. William protested he was much too tired; and yet, when the others were about to put away their cues, he persuaded them to have one more game, and still another, until Stanhope declined point blank. Never had the young Squire shown himself so docile to his mother, so affable to his guests, as upon that night, nor, it may be added, so disinclined for his own unimproving society. Was it possible that Mr. William Blackburn had taken his mother's words to heart at last, and was about to turn over a new leaf?

CHAPTER XXXI.

UNCLE DEAN.

THE next day Mr. William's conduct still showed signs of grace. He was silent; but then in his case silence was indeed golden, though his speech could scarcely have been described as "silvern," but rather as small change in brass. He not only made no objection to the family migration to "the Fishery," which it was arranged at breakfast should take place on the ensuing day, but evinced a strong desire to depart at once: "Why couldn't they go that very afternoon?"

This could not be done at such short notice, because of certain arrangements necessary to be effected for the invalid; but it was suggested by

Mrs. Blackburn that all was ready at the cottage, if William liked to precede the party by four-and-twenty hours, and establish himself there alone. But this he would by no means listen to; he would wait and travel with the rest. His sociability was so extreme as to become almost oppressive to poor Mr. Waller, to whom he chiefly attached himself. "I like to hear you talk, Waller, you have got such capital stories: be lively, there's a good fellow, because I feel rather down in the mouth, and as if, somehow, I was going to be ill."

It was rather difficult to be lively under such depressing circumstances, and especially as his companion did not exhibit the slightest appreciation of his efforts, or indeed appear to listen to one word he said. His eye was on the watch, his ear was on the stretch, for that expected some one, more than ever.

Yet, when the footman came into the room where they were sitting late in the afternoon, with: "You are wanted, if you please, sir, by a person in the front hall," Mr. William seemed by no means relieved by that indefinite summons. On the contrary, his lips grew white, and his jaw fell, so that he could not utter a word; and it was ready Mr. Waller who put the question for him: "What sort of a person is it, John, and what is his business?"

"Well, sir, he said he wouldn't give his name, but that Mr. William knew all about him. I think he's some sort of a horsey gent."

"Yes, yes," said William with a testiness which the sharp eyes of the ex-M. P. at once perceived was assumed to conceal a sense of relief, "I know the fellow. I have been expecting him this long time. It is a disagreeable business.—I am afraid I must see him alone, Waller.—John, if there is no one in the drawing-room, show him in there;" and in a few minutes the young Squire was face to face in that gorgeous saloon with a man who had known him in his least prosperous days, and who knew his secret, but to whom, as we have seen, he had made up his mind not to give a sixpence of hush-money, and to carry matters with a high hand.

Still, Mr. William's manner was far from that of one who wishes to pick a quarrel, or even to maintain a frigid isolation, as he rose and shook hands with Uncle Dean. This gentleman, whom circumstances had associated with horse-flesh, and whose tight-fitting trowsers and sporting scarf-pin had doubtless led the footman to that just conclusion, had certainly not been intended by nature for the saddle. He was upward of six feet high, and of great weight, if there is any truth in the adage, "It is bone that weighs;" but, whether from the constant habit of physical "jockeying"—that leaning forward to hussle with the reins—or from that moral "jockeying" which requires an earthward vision and a close inspection of one's fellow-creatures, his back was bent into a bow, which, assisted by the quick, searching glance that he bestowed upon his nephew by marriage, made him look one huge

note of interrogation. He had placed a deep band of crape round his hat, in token of his sorrow for the loss of their common relative; but his long waistcoat was bright yellow, his trowsers green, and his scarf a brilliant blue. Perhaps the poetry of his nature, forbidden an outlet through the usual channel, exhibited and expanded itself in color, but certainly he was very highly tinted; nor was it his own fault, but Time's, that the hair which had been red was now quite gray.

"How are you, Dean? It was kind of you to come and look me up. I am only sorry that the house is full, so that I can not ask you to take a bed."

"Don't mention it, Mr. Blackburn, don't mention it. I had no idea of sponging on you to that extent, I do assure you; but being in the neighborhood, and wishing to hear about poor Bess—"

"That's a sad story, Dean," broke in the other hastily, "and I don't wish to talk about it. Take some wine—take some gin. Here, what's your name? bring this gentleman some gin and hot water. That used to be your tipple, did it not?"

"Why, yes, and yours too, in the old days," said Mr. Dean slyly; "but there, I suppose with the run of the cellars of a place like this, you never touch any thing worse than champagne and brandy. Dear, dear, what a change it seems! Richardson and I were talking over it only the other evening."

"Richardson is an infernal scoundrel," observed Mr. William bluntly.

"Well, he does run a little near the wind at times, no doubt. But so we all do, for the matter of that, or *have done*, eh, Mr. Blackburn? As he was saying, only think of your being here a squire, and a magistrate, I suppose, and all the rest of it; sending poor folks to prison. Lor, what a game it is!"

"Yes, Mr. Dean, and it's a game that I have taken care shall not be spoiled by any man," said the other slowly. "I felt, of course, that I need never fear any molestation from *you*; but knowing what sort of a man Richardson was, and how like him it would be to hold over my head, as it were, for the purpose of extorting money, that trouble I got into at Chester, I made up my mind, upon assuming my position here, to make a clear breast of it at once."

"You don't mean to tell me that all these fine folks about here know that you were in that horse-job, and got?"—(Mr. Dean looked cautiously round the room, and the shining faces of the inlaid cabinets and gilded mirrors seemed to make him more cautious, for his voice sank to a whisper)—"got put into quod?"

"Yes, I do," said Mr. William boldly. "I don't say that the servants and village people have been told, but every body with whom the knowledge of such a circumstance could do me harm was put into possession of it at once. Of course, it did do me harm, but the worst is past, and the ground on which I stand at least is firm."

If you still doubt me," for the other wore a very incredulous look, "ask Mr. Herbert Stanhope, whom, I suppose, you know, and who is staying here at present."

As Uncle Dean sat rubbing his chin with his large hand, you might have thought that his face was made of gutta-percha, and that he was pulling it out inches at a time, so obviously did it lengthen at these words. It was evident to him that the moral lever which he had brought with him to work upon his nephew-by-marriage would have no mechanical force.

"So Mr. Stanhope is with you, is he?" observed he slowly. "I know of more than one 'party' that would be glad to know where he was."

"Owes money, does he?"

"Money! He owes a fortune. *Gazeebo* must have cost him twenty or thirty thousand pounds at Goodwood; that is, he would have cost him, if he could have paid it. The idea is that he is gone abroad for a time, and that when he comes back he will settle every thing; and Sporting Dawlish sticks by him in that story. But there, since Mr. Stanhope is a friend of yours, I'm mum. What a fine room this is, Mr. Blackburn, and what a fine place! Lor, if my poor Bess could but rise out of her grave—What's the matter, sir?"

"Matter, man!" cried Mr. William, trembling violently—"did not I tell you not to talk about her, not to speak upon that subject? If she happened to be alive, I couldn't stop you; I am quite aware of that. You would have been coming over here a dozen times a year to borrow money of me, upon the score of our relationship. But, mark me! if ever I give you a farthing—and I don't say I will, mind—it must be upon the distinct understanding that you never breathe a word about—about your late niece. The fact is," and here Mr. William began to whine and whimper, "you may believe it or not as you please, Dean, but I was not altogether a good husband to that poor girl; I was harsh and rough with her at times; and now she's gone, I can't bear to think about it."

"And she was a delicate creetur, too," said Mr. Dean, shaking his head. Poor Bess had been really his own niece, and perhaps his conscience pricked him in that he had not been altogether a good uncle to her: or perhaps he only wished to exaggerate the case, as a question for damages. "As delicate a creetur as ever I saw."

"Just so," said Mr. William. "She died of a consumption with which she had long been threatened, out in foreign parts. The whole matter is one with which all my people are well acquainted, but of which they do not speak, because they know it pains me. You will oblige me, therefore, Mr. Dean, by being silent also. There is nothing to be gained by speaking of it, either to me or any one else, you understand that, I suppose?"

Uncle Dean nodded assent; he had carefully gone over that idea, with an eye to business,

and had been obliged to come to the conclusion, that no profit could be made out of a relationship that had become extinct. It had afforded him an excuse for his present visit (the real object of which had been precisely what his nephew had foreseen), and nothing more could reasonably be expected of it.

"Very well," said Mr. William, "you will distinctly bear in mind, then, that any present which I may think fit to make you now or hereafter is neither a tax nor a due. I fear no menace, as you may tell that scoundrel Richardson, if you please—and I acknowledge no claim in respect of our late connection by marriage."

"I see that, sir, all quite plain," answered Mr. Dean deferentially. "I am quite sure you have no call to help me with a shilling—though, if Bess had been alive, and knew that her poor uncle, who brought her up from childhood, was so devilish hard up as he is just now—"

"There, there; that will do, Mr. Dean: I was quite aware that we were coming to that at last. Well, I had a hundred pounds with your niece when I married her, and I don't say but that I may be induced to refund it to you, as her representative, upon a certain condition."

"I'll take my solemn oath, Mr. Blackburn, that I'll never speak of Bess again as long as I live, if that is what you want. Of course, if you're going to marry again (as I hear is the case), you don't want people to go tittle-tattling all over the county about your late wife and her humble station just now."

"Excuse me, Mr. Dean," said the other peremptorily, "you would seem to imply that your silence is of some material importance to me; whereas no word of yours respecting your late niece could affect my interest in the smallest degree. It is merely a question of sentiment. I have asked you, as a favor, to avoid in future all mention of a certain subject, though I do not deny that you may have hit upon my reason for so doing. The condition I would impose is something quite different. You say that you know more than one party to whom Mr. Herbert Stanhope owes large sums, and who would be glad to know of his whereabouts."

"Yes, Mr. Blackburn, I do; but I'll be mum as death for your sake—and in consideration of that hundred pounds you speak of."

"Be so good as to hear me out, Mr. Dean. You say that Mr. Stanhope owes in all twenty or thirty thousand pounds. How is it he has not been declared a defaulter?"

"Well, it's all Mr. Dawlish's doing, that is. He has the ear of some of our big men, and has persuaded them to wait; but there's others as I know of as have a matter of eleven thousand; or perhaps twelve thousand pounds in all, against Mr. Stanhope, and they're hungry enough, I can tell you. They have been told it will be better for them not to press matters; but that don't stay their stomachs, you see, and they would like to know what I know, most un-

common. It's so precious difficult, you see, to get hold of a chap abroad."

"Just so. I will write you a check for fifty pounds, Mr. Dean, upon the understanding that you tell them (not from me, of course, but as a piece of information you happen to have obtained) that Mr. Herbert Stanhope is staying *here*. Let them press him as hard as they please. Do you comprehend, man?"

"Very good, Mr. Blackburn; but"—Uncle Dean hesitated a moment, and it is possible that across his untutored mind there flitted some crude notion of violated hospitality—"I warn you that they'll make it very hot for him. Once they think they have been deceived, they'll be as eager as a pack of hounds who have been thrown off the scent, and suddenly find it breast high. Damme, they'll be fit to tear him to pieces!"

"Let them tear him," said Mr. William sullenly. "When you have set them on, but not before, I'll send you the check for the other fifty."

"You may consider that as good as done, Mr. Blackburn," said Uncle Dean as he drained his glass and rose from his chair. "If you have no other commands for me, it is time that I should be off."

"As you please, Mr. Dean. This is a sick-house, or I should have been glad to offer you something more of hospitality. I have guests who, I do assure you, are less welcome. Perhaps, by the way, it will be well that you should see one of them, whose voice I can hear upon the terrace yonder, with your own eyes; you will not then need to speak from hearsay." Mr. William pointed to the window, and bidding the other to look out without being observed, asked him what he saw.

"I see a very pretty young woman, and a young man who has his back to me, but is evidently making himself most uncommon agreeable to her. I should say there was love in the case on one side, at the very least.—Now he turns; yes, that's my man, sure enough; and I confess I'm sorry for it, Mr. Blackburn; for Mr. Stanhope was ever an open-handed young gentleman so long as there was any—"

"Here is a check for the fifty," interrupted the other coolly. "And now I will show you to your vehicle by the back way, since it's just as well our young friend yonder should not know to whom he is indebted for whatever happens.—Good-bye, Dean, and remember the sooner you set about your work the sooner you will get your pay.—Yes, yes," muttered Mr. William as he re-entered the house alone, "I'll put a spoke in Mr. Stanhope's wheel for him: twice has he interfered in my affairs; so that I shall owe him one even when these hornets come about him."

He turned into the little room where he had left Mr. Waller; but that gentleman, as soon as he had got released from his companion, had incontinently fled. It was growing dusk, and solitude was so insupportable to the young

Squire that he hastened to join the pair upon the terrace, notwithstanding that they were the two individuals whom, of all the unloved world, he liked the least. But at the open hall door he stopped, petrified with amazement at what he saw upon the terrace. As Uncle Dean had described it, there was indeed a young man making himself so very agreeable to a young woman that it seemed that love must be upon one side at least: he was leaning forward and speaking eloquently, if not passionately, into her very ear, while she, though shaking her fair head with gravity, by no means had the appearance of inflexible denial. He seemed rather to be excusing himself for some course of conduct which she was reprobating, yet not without holding out a hope of pardon. But what had turned Mr. William into stone, as though it were a Gorgon's head, and had also transformed his features into some likeness of a Gorgon, was this, that the object of these marked attentions of Mr. Herbert Stanhope was not Ellen, as of course her uncle had expected it to be, but Lucy Waller!

CHAPTER XXXII.

THE JOURNEY.

SURELY it is one of the most extravagant weaknesses of the human heart to set its affections on an object which does not reciprocate them; we may indeed love a child without our care and devotion being appreciated, or indeed any particular regard being shown to us in return; but in the case of a grown-up woman, how can a man be so foolish as to press his attentions where they are not desired, and where, therefore, they must needs be unpleasant?

Although one would think that a very little self-conceit, or proper pride, would cause such a suitor to give up his quest at once, it is not usually a symptom of humility to persevere, but rather of a coarse and vehement will. Mr. William Blackburn, for instance, as we have seen, was by no means of Sir John Suckling's opinion:

"If she be not fair to me,
What care I how fair she be?"

but coveted Lucy all the more that she, on her part, exhibited no sort of inclination for him. The scene he had witnessed on the terrace transported him for the time with rage, and laid up in his mind a third occasion of hatred against Herbert Stanhope, in comparison with which the two already garnered there were but slight. It was likely enough, indeed, that he might have been mistaken as to the cause of that gentleman's warmth of manner towards a young lady who had been his friend and neighbor from childhood, and, on the other hand, Lucy herself had certainly manifested no corresponding emotion; but when was jealousy capable of reflection? Under the circumstances, it was wonderful that William Blackburn was able to conceal the anger that consumed him; but the fact was,

the spectacle he had witnessed was not altogether without its mitigation: he felt himself tolerably secure of Lucy, since her father's fortunes depended upon her consent; and he was not displeased, for a certain reason, to persuade himself that Stanhope was not personally devoted to Ellen. At all events, Mr. William's manner continued as urbane as we have observed it to be for the last four-and-twenty hours, and his inclination for society as strong; of this latter, the following was a curious example. Mr. Waller and his daughter had departed the next morning for Mosedale, upon the understanding that they should spend the ensuing day at the Fishery, and Mr. Stanhope accompanied them as far as Curlew Hall, where he had business to occupy him for a few hours; so that the Blackburn family were for once left to themselves.

"I suppose, Willy, you will take the mare over to the cottage?" said Mrs. Blackburn after her guests had departed. "You will have a charming ride across the moor."

"Why so?" inquired he sharply. "Why should I not drive with you?"

"Well, of course, my darling, we should be only too glad of your company; but then, you see, there is but room for two in the invalid carriage which takes your poor father."

"Then let Ellen go in that, and do you come with me in the brougham. We have never yet ridden in our own carriage together, you and I."

Mrs. Blackburn hesitated: perhaps it struck her, that if not now, she would probably never again drive with her Anthony, and that it was to him that her duty was first owed; but she gave way, as usual, and the brougham was ordered accordingly. Only she did insist upon its following the other vehicle, in place of preceding it. Her son, whose desire to get away from Redcombe seemed to grow stronger every hour, would have had it driven at a quicker rate, "So as," said he, "to be at the cottage beforehand, and get all things ready for the governor."

But his mother was firm in adhering to her own plan. "Every thing is quite prepared there, Willy, and I will not consent to be separated from your father more than has been already done. Think if any thing should happen to him on the way, and I were not close at hand, could I ever forgive myself?"

And so, not unlike a funeral procession, the invalid carriage, with its motionless occupant and Ellen, took the lead, while the brougham followed at the same slow pace. The villagers lined the little street in mournful silence. The short experience they had had of the old Squire's rule had been a favorable one, and they had every reason to expect less good at his successor's hands. As for the report of the estate having been left to Miss Ellen, they did not credit it: the Blackburn land had always gone from father to son. It was indeed a melancholy exodus. It was observed that Mr. William was very pale and awed, and exhibited much more feeling than he had been supposed to possess. Singular to say, this not only continued to be the case with

him, but he even grew more serious as they proceeded on their journey. In vain his mother endeavored to console him. "You must not give way so, dear Willy, although I am glad to see you so deeply touched. It is rather for me to weep, who must soon lose the friend and lover of fifty years yonder. The last time, yes, the very last that he and I journeyed together this way—" The poor lady could not finish the sentence; the memory of the past was too bitter to be shaped in speech: it was a fact that the last time she and Anthony had taken the Mosedale Road together was on their way to be married, when they were little more than boy and girl. There are probably but few old people, even of the most unsentimental sort, on whom at times some thought of this kind must intrude, more affecting, surely, than any grief which self-conscious youth imagines or supposes. Perhaps the springs of regret are as fast frozen in their case as those of passion? Heaven grant it may be so.

There was one consideration that certainly tended to Mrs. Blackburn's comfort—the universal sense of her husband's hopeless condition confined her own apprehensions to that channel, and removed her anxiety with respect to her son. If any warning of approaching death had really been sent through her to the House of Blackburn, it must surely needs have relation to the poor Squire, whom all men thus regarded as a doomed and dying man. It was in continuation of this idea, so strong in its possession of her mind that she was probably ignorant of not having given it expression, that she suddenly whispered, as they drew near the termination of the moorland: "We are getting near the very place now, Willy." Her son had been leaning back with closed eyes, but he opened them at those words, and turned upon her a face of ghostly horror.

"Don't fear, Willie," said she, herself greatly alarmed at his appearance, inasmuch as he had hitherto affected to speak of the matter with contemptuous disbelief: "it is your poor father who has been sent for, if any body, and not you, darling. I feel quite sure of that, except when you look so strange as you are doing now.—What on earth ails you, Willy?"

"Nothing, nothing," gasped he. — "Why don't they drive faster? They are stopping, they are stopping, I tell you! What do they see?"

"Stopping?" cried his mother: "then something has happened to Anthony; oh dear! oh dear!" and as the brougham pulled up, she opened the door, and got out quickly.

"Stay here, stay with me," cried William wildly: "I will not be left alone."

But she was already out of hearing.

After all, the leading carriage had but stopped on the brow of the steep Redmoor hill to put the drag on; but Mrs. Blackburn seized the opportunity to look in upon the invalid. Was it her fancy, or had the passing through the air really revived him somewhat from that long lethargy,

and even called up a tinge of color in his pallid cheeks? Or was it possible that the scent of the fir-grove, or the sight of the gentle waving tops, had in his mind also awakened a reminiscence? Certainly his eyes welcomed his wife with a glance of ineffable tenderness, such as they had not shed for many a day.

"I think he would like you to get in and sit by his side, grandmother," whispered Ellen earnestly.

"I will, I will," replied she. "But do you take my place with Willy. Your uncle is not well, Ellen; look to him."

Her grandmother and she therefore changed places. It was the first time for weeks that Ellen had been left alone with her uncle, and she shrank from the idea of his rough companionship; but, to her astonishment, he seemed pleased to see her, and scarcely to notice that she was his mother's substitute. She was about to explain why she had left the other carriage, but he interrupted her with incoherent words: "Quite right. Good girl, good girl. We are moving now. Faster, faster! Why do they linger? Let me hold your hand;" and he took her fingers in his own, and clasped them tight. "Are we down the hill yet? Have we passed the—the fir-grove? Is the moorland out of sight?" For again he had closed his eyes, as though unwilling to look out upon the landscape.

"We are nearly down the hill, uncle," answered Ellen quietly, though in extreme surprise; the moor is out of sight, and I can only just catch the top of the embankment of the reservoir. Now we are stopping once more to take the drag off. The valley lies open before us, and there is Mosedale Church spire." She went on talking, not for talking's sake, but with that desire which seizes us when alone with those with whom we are ill at ease, to avoid silence. "It is certainly warmer here than at Redcombe; it seems as though we were miles and miles away already. How green and summer-like are these fields and woods!"

"Ay, so they are. It looks quite different, as you say. The air is better too; I felt so oppressed just now—it was the warmth of the fir-grove, I suppose—that I could hardly breathe. Did I not look ill? Did I not say foolish things? I think I must have been half-fainting."

"You looked very pale, uncle, but seem much better now. As you say, the air is delightful, though it is surely not so fresh as on the moorland. Heaven grant it may do grandfather some good!"

"Just so: it's lovely. I think I'll just smoke a pipe. Tobacco always does me so much good. I'm deuced glad we have left Redcombe, for I think the place was beginning to disagree with me; at least I felt uncommonly hipped."

"It has been a sad house of late to all of us," sighed Ellen. "First, the tidings of poor Aunt Bess's death! What a kind heart she had, and how she loved you, uncle! I can scarcely picture to myself that she is really dead; and I sometimes think—" She hesitated.

"Think what?" interrupted William fiercely.

"Well, perhaps it's wrong, uncle; but I sometimes think that if she had been amongst us, and lived at home, and especially as we live now, no longer pinched and worried by poverty, she might have been spared to us yet. Dear patient, loving Bess, I seem to see her now!"

"Don't be a fool," cried Uncle William angrily. "Why do you talk about a subject which you know I detest? That is, one that is naturally painful to me. You are worse than your grandmother: she is always talking about dying people, as if I could help the governor's being in such a bad way. Is it not enough to be with him all day, without coming down stairs and telling other people all about it, so as to make their flesh creep?"

"You see, uncle, dear grandmother finds it hard to get poor grandfather out of her thoughts."

"So it seems, indeed. But that reminds me. —I dare say *you*, Miss Ellen, are not so entirely wrapped up in your grandfather's state of health (however much you may be interested by his *death*) as not sometimes to think of other things—such as marriage, for instance.—There, you are turning quite red, which is as good as a 'yes.' Well, I dare say you think yourself quite sure of your young man—that you have only got to whistle to him when you want him. But don't you be too sure; that's all I say."

Ellen was indeed blushing scarlet, but it was with contemptuous indignation at her uncle's words. She had for the moment forgotten the very existence of the person to whom he was alluding.

"I say," continued Mr. William, "you may be cut out by somebody whom you little suspect, if you are not civil to that fellow Stanhope—as civil as I am to Lucy, for instance."

"How can you talk of Lucy, uncle, in that way," cried Ellen passionately, "with dear Aunt Bess scarce cold in her grave?"

There was a long pause; the allusion was certainly not without its effect upon the widower; his face once more assumed a ghostly pallor, and even his lips turned white. Ellen began to think that she had given him too sharp a shock.

"Look here," said he huskily; "just mark me, once for all, you slut! you mind your own business. It is about your own affairs, not mine, that I am talking to you. You are not holding this man Stanhope tight enough in hand."

"Mr. Stanhope is nothing to me, uncle," said Ellen firmly.

"Ay, but he is, though; and he shall be too, at all events for the present. Don't you know what your grandfather wishes, miss, and ain't I here, as it were, in the place of your grandfather? You had better not make an enemy of me, I promise you." He grasped her roughly by the wrist, and wore his ugliest look. "I am not going to be thwarted by any living soul. Do you hear *that*? If I think it well that you shall have this man, you *shall* have him; and if not, *not*. You are to hold him now fast, now loose, just as I tell

you; or, by Heaven! it will be the worse for you. You don't know me yet,— Confound the wench, if she has not fainted right off! I'm glad I've given her a good fright, however; and here's the Curlew, with plenty of water to bring her round."

The next minute they had crossed the bridge over the stream; and the Fishery with its little garden lay immediately before them—as fair a dwelling as was ever seen by river-side.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

AT THE COTTAGE.

It was no "pride that apes humility" which caused the Blackburns to speak of their residence on the Curlew as "the cottage." It was indeed a miniature house, with every thing about it, including the scenery, of the same duodecimo description. The river itself, although pretty deep, was but thirty feet across; the banks on each side, albeit quite precipitous, could scarcely be called cliffs; and although at the bridge on the road to Mosedale they diverged, leaving a broad view to the inhabitants of the Fishery, and allowing air and sun to visit it freely, at the spot on which Richard had built his bower there was but just room for a narrow carriage-road, which led past it through the still contracting gorge to a mill about a mile up stream, after which it became a mere horse-track to Redmoor. On the opposite side there was not even a footpath, the bank descending quite sheer. Had the road not existed, the cottage would have been upon an island. As it was, it stood upon a curved promontory, the small portion of which not actually occupied by the building was devoted to the tiniest of flower-gardens; on to this the windows of the two small sitting-rooms looked, and indeed immediately opened, so that one step from either brought you among the roses, which seemed to grow in mid-stream. If there had been any object of size within sight, the whole scene would have been dwarfed, and made almost ridiculous, from the exceedingly small scale of every thing; but being where it was, nothing could be more perfect and charming. It might have been transported, bridge and all, to the stage of Old Drury (on which there would have been plenty of room for it), and used with the lime-light for the performance of *La Sonnambula*. On the Curlew there was sometimes a moon, which, in its humble way was also not ineffectual; bridge and stream, cottage and garden, were then bathed in such dreamy splendors as no brush can portray.

There was a boat-house attached to this little territory, looking like a boat towed astern by a ship which is not much bigger; and it was for it, or rather its contents, that the whole place had been erected by Fisherman Richard without the slightest reference to the picturesque. For him the Curlew had had no other charms beyond that one caught fish in it. The decorations of

the little dining-room were characteristic in a high degree of its former owner, and if not artistic, had a certain quaint and natural fitness of their own. It was a sort of fisherman's sanctum, where every thing that is most dear to the lovers of the gentle art was reverently enshrined. Not only did every weapon—net, and rod, and spear—that is used against the finny tribe, find a place about its walls and across its low-raftered roof, but even the very fishes were there that had fallen victims to them. Unlike those barbarians who eat the prisoners whom they take in war, Richard had preserved his finest captives and stuffed them. The grinning trophies of his skill swam, as it were, each in his ample glass case, round and round the room—here a vast pike with cruel jaws agape, and here a speckled trout, and here a fat round chub; each, too, had the particulars of its capture described with great minuteness upon a written label. "This pike was killed a little above Curlew Bridge by Richard Blackburn, Esq., of Blackburn Manor, with this hook" (a very rusty little weapon by this time), "and part of this line. It weighed twenty-seven and a half pounds;" and so on. Stuffed water-birds, "Shot by Richard Blackburn, of Blackburn Manor," alternated with their hereditary foes or victims, so that the whole apartment had the appearance of a natural history museum. The drawing-room was destitute of ornament, though literature and art were in a manner represented by the *Angler's Guide* and a book of artificial flies, which lay on the otherwise empty shelves.

Mrs. Blackburn's efforts at decoration had been confined to the invalid's apartment, which had, in accordance with a suggestion of Ellen's, been wainscoted with mirrors, so that he could command from his pillow the bridge and all who passed over it, as well as the road and a long reach of river. If the poor squire had been acquainted with the poets, he might have likened himself to the Lady of Shalott, to whom the world was shown in the same fashion; for he, too, "saw the highway near," "the red cloaks of the market-girls," the pack-horses of the miller with their white sacks, the farmer "on his ambling pad," and all the life that the place afforded. For him, too, "the river eddy whirled" continuously, and the still pool dimpled, while the stealthy rush of the main stream close by soothed him with its monotone. "Men may come and men may go," it doubtless said to him, if not in those very words, yet with their full significance, "but I flow on forever." It was a tender and provident thought that had thus supplied him with visions of a world to which he would have been otherwise blind, and it seemed to afford him pleasure. That very afternoon his eyes were seen to brighten, as across the little bridge rode Lucy Waller, who even so soon had come on horseback, doubtless to inquire how the sick man had borne his journey. He saw her stop to look up with pity at his open lattice-window, and to kiss her hand to Ellen standing in the garden beneath.

Lucy found her friend somewhat pale from the shock she had lately suffered, but of which Ellen said not a word. Her uncle's conduct was inexplicable to her. She had often known him dictatorial and menacing, but always with some definite object to be gained. But what could his design be now in bidding her, as he had expressed it, "play fast and loose" with Herbert Stanhope? As for obeying him, the idea never entered into her mind; but it was scarcely less degrading to have had such a shameful course of conduct enjoined upon her. Upon the whole, taking into consideration his behavior on the previous portion of the journey, she was inclined to think that her uncle's brain was getting disordered through his intemperate habits. But even that was not a comforting reflection, for he was not likely to amend his ways in the seclusion of the Fishery, where there was still less to occupy him than at the Manor.

"What a paradise you have got here!" cried Lucy when she found herself in the rose-garden. "To me, just come out of smoky Mosedale, it seems too beautiful to be real. I think, as I look at it, surely this will all melt away before my eyes."

"It is very pretty," said Ellen sighing; "and yet, though I have begun to miss you so already, I would not have you here with us if I could."

"Not have me here! Why not!"

Ellen colored; for she had uttered that wish involuntarily, with Uncle William's words about Lucy still ringing in her ears.

"Well, it seems so lonely," said she, "and so shut out of the world. The river, too, has such a melancholy sound."

"As one thinks, darling, so the bell tinks," said Lucy archly. "What would you say, now, if I made the stream discourse music to you, and the sunshine stay here all day?"

"Oh Lucy, you have seen John!"

"What an excellent guesser of riddles you are, my dear," cried Lucy laughing. "Yes, I have seen him, and that is partly why I came so soon here to see you. I thought it would please you to know that he is so near—that if, for instance, you dropped this rose-leaf into the swift stream, it would float to him in a few minutes."

"How good and kind you are to think of John and me, when—" There was something, if not of annoyance, yet of embarrassment in her friend's face that made Ellen hesitate to finish the sentence, as she had intended to do, with some reference to Lucy's dead lover. Something, too, there was in the nature of Lucy's last remark which suddenly struck her and made her pause. Lucy was always kind; but such a tender thought as that of the mere nearness of her lover making Ellen happy, was somewhat uncharacteristic of Mr. Waller's daughter. Could love itself, new love, have possibly suggested it to her?

"What's that?" said Ellen, pretending to be interrupted by a sound that broke upon her ear—the slow beat of a horse's feet. "There is some

one coming down the road from Redmoor; I wonder whether it is Mr. Stanhope."

"It is likely enough," said Lucy carelessly, and turning her head in the opposite direction.—"What a pretty picture might be made of yonder reach, with the arch of the bridge for its frame." She had suddenly grown pink to the ear-tips.

"And what did you say to John, Lucy? Or, if you will not confess that, what was it he said to you?"

"Well, my darling, the fact is, he has come down again to Mosedale upon the same business as before, it seems; there is something wrong again with the reservoir. You must not be angry, dear Ellen, but I am afraid papa is vexed with Mr. Denton."

"Vexed with John?" cried Ellen, in a tone that would have fitted "Vexed with the sunshine? vexed with the blue air?" "What can he be vexed with John about?"

"I can't tell, dear; but so it is. Papa is greatly worried by other matters just now, grievously troubled, I may say, and doubtless he was easily put out. There has been, at all events, some difference of opinion between them; and Mr. Denton declines to be our guest. I am more annoyed by it than I can tell you."

"But what did John say, Lucy? I mean, what were his very words?"

"Oh; of course he said nothing within my hearing but what was pleasant: regretted exceedingly that he felt himself unable to take advantage of our hospitality, and so forth. He will be some time in the town, however, and I hope the matter will be made up: indeed, I heard him tell papa that a day or two would decide which of them was in the right."

"But did he send no message to me?"

"Well, papa was with me, darling, so that he could not be very communicative; but when I spoke of you, it was easy to see in whose safe keeping he had placed his heart. I told him, of course, that you had come here, within a mile or two of Mosedale. 'What! at the Fishery Cottage?' cried he; and you should have seen how he flushed up. Though you may not write to him, there would be no harm in your gathering a rose, and giving it to him by deputy, would there?"

Ellen plucked a flower, and, smiling her thanks, kissed Lucy fondly.

"What! am I to give him that too?" said the other laughing.—"There, how serious that has made you look! What a thing it is to be jealous!"

"No, dear, it was not that; what makes me grave is the thought of there being any quarrel between John and Mr. Waller. I can't understand it."

"That is because you don't understand business, dear. So long as men have nothing to do with each other's affairs, they consort together as peaceably as women, and more so. They chatter and laugh, and tell stories to one another, like school-boys in holiday-time. But direct-

ly a question of pecuniary interest arises to set them in antagonism, they grow hard and rude enough."

"But John's never hard nor rude, I am sure."

"Well, I don't know Mr. Denton so well as you do," said Lucy, laughing; "but I must confess he was rather excited in his manner this morning—quite as much so as papa; though papa was most to blame, since he was in his own house. But, oh Ellen, he is so full of trouble, if you only knew, you would forgive him all, I'm sure.—But hush; don't let us talk about it. Here is some one coming.—Why, how slowly you ride, Mr. Stanhope! We have heard your horse's hoofs this quarter of an hour. We thought it was the miller's nag with the sacks."

"I am glad to hear that any grist comes to my mill," said Herbert rather ruefully. "Mr. Moffat has just been proving to me that it never does.—How is your grandfather, Miss Ellen, after his long drive? And how do you all like your new quarters? At present, I can scarcely congratulate you upon the change: I have not seen you look so pale these many weeks. I am afraid you had an anxious journey."

"I am quite well, thank you," said Ellen coldly; for there was something just then unpleasant to her in the manifestation of Mr. Stanhope's interest; "but we are all a little tired."

"Don't you believe her," cried a gruff voice from the dining-room, where Mr. William had been keeping himself private with the object of ascertaining whether Ellen should say any thing to Lucy of his recent behavior, but he had only overheard enough of the conversation to make him suspicious. "We are only moped to death in this rat-hole. Come in, and let's be jolly. What say you to our taking the young ladies on the water? Miss Lucy will come with me in the skiff, and you can take the punt with Ellen."

"Thank you, Mr. William, but I have no time just now," said Lucy, gathering up the skirts of her riding-habit. "I promised papa to return home as soon as I had seen how you all were."

"And I must go up to grandfather," said Ellen, "and take him these flowers.—Good-bye, dear Lucy; you will be here early to-morrow, will you not, and spend a good long day with us?"

"As soon after breakfast as I can get papa away, dear; and I will be sure not to forget your message."

"Message! what message?" inquired Mr. William testily, with a mistrustful glance at his niece.

"Never you mind, Mr. William," said Lucy gaily; "that message is under the rose."

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE WARNING.

As is usual with folks who find themselves in new quarters, the household at the Fishery

were astir early the next morning, which was a warm and sunny one. Mr. William—who had retired late, as was his wont, and kept Stanhope from his bed with urgent appeals for another cigar and one more glass of grog—rose earlier than any. He was heard fussing about the house a little after dawn, and rousing up the old fisherman, who was attached to the premises much as the punt was, without which he rarely moved. He had been Squire Richard's factotum on the river, and had gauged the capacity of every curve, and fall, and pool with respect to fish. The previous night he had cast bread upon the waters in the shape of a gallon of worms, in a particular spot miles away down stream, from which investment he had promised Mr. William great results; and the two were off together, long before the breakfast-hour, on that hopeful expedition. They had taken plenty of provisions with them, and it was understood that they would not return till late in the afternoon. Ellen at her chamber-window heard their gruff voices mingle with the grating of the punt-pole, and saw them glide a-slant across the yielding lilies and into the shadow of the bridge, and sighed. They were going whither she would fain have gone, poor girl; and would presently pass Mosedale, and perhaps see him.

The swallows were skimming across the stream, and dipping their wings; the dragon-flies were flitting about like living light; the fish leaped high in air, and sank in widening circles; and all the life of the river was awake and glad. The garden beneath, now dipped in dew, sent up its grateful incense; and the fresh voices of the air seemed to call to her to come forth and enjoy. Ah! if she could only have been free to welcome him to that new home, how fair and bright a place it would have seemed! For a moment she was almost tempted to inquire why that slender skein of duty should bind her hand and foot as it did, and keep her from him she loved, when the least effort of her own would have snapped it. But she put the thought away from her as swiftly as it had intruded, and descended, all the more charming for her victory, to gather a poesy for the breakfast-table, and, as fresh and bright as any rosebud of them all, to busy herself with household cares. Then after breakfast, as usual, to grandfather's room, there to stay for the long morning.

Virtue had its reward for her in at least this respect, that the loving forethought that had supplied the sick man with these living pictures of the world without, now bore fruit for her also. It was almost as good as being out of doors that day—bright herald of the coming summer though it was—to sit in that mirrored chamber, and watch all things move around her; for all things had motion; even the bridge would change from gloom to gray, from gray to gloom, as the light clouds flecked the sun, or left it bare; and the one willow for which the road had room, hanging its dishevelled hair in the restless stream, "shook away" like a poplar. The feathery

reeds in the island below the bridge danced like the daffodils, and, like them, made a picture in her mental eye forever. Suddenly she started up with a muffled cry, and looked towards the window: on the shining wall beside her had been cast the reflex of an approaching horseman; and he is now upon the bridge. His eyes are fixed upon the cottage, upon the window, upon her. He touches the red rose that blushes in his button-hole, and doffs his hat. What can have brought John Denton hither, whom her grandfather has forbidden to visit her? whom she has passed her word she will not receive? The sick man has seen him also, and fixes on her a reproving look. It seems to say as plainly as spoken words: "I am obeyed no longer, then, being smitten thus sorely, and already half dead; and yet I have loved you so, Nelly, and tended you in the days gone by."

"You do me wrong, grandfather," cried she passionately. "I know that you think I have disobeyed you, and broken my word, but indeed it is not so. I don't know why John is here. If you forbid it, I will not see him—if you do forbid it." And although her tone might have melted a harder heart than his, he did forbid it. Had he been lying for months with nought to comfort him but the thought of how the Blackburn race might still hold its own and keep its place through her, to forego his desire now, when all but accomplished—with the very man beneath his roof to whom he looked to have her wedded? Had he not even given him his will in keeping, in token of that confidence? Was not the world aware and expectant of her matching with him? Had not his reprobate son himself submitted to the arrangement as inevitable? And now, should he risk all being undone by permitting this John Denton to see Nelly? No, no.

"Do not fear, grandfather; since you forbid it, I will not see him; I will stay here;" and she drew her chair behind the curtain of the bed, out of his sight, and listened with pale face, pressing her hand against her beating heart. Presently Mrs. Blackburn's hurried step was heard upon the stairs, and she came in, looking confused and troubled.

"Nelly," whispered she, "I want you a minute; come outside with me."

"Grandfather knows," said Ellen quietly. "He saw John Denton come over the bridge."

Mrs. Blackburn glanced at the sick man; his eyes were moist, and had an expression in them of unwonted tenderness.

"Has he given you leave to see him?" said she. "If so, why, of course, I shall say nothing: though it seems a pity, after matters have gone so far with Mr. Stanhope; and I am afraid Willy will be very angry."

"I care nothing for Uncle William's anger, grandmother," said Ellen proudly; "but I have promised not to see John, and I will keep my word, since grandfather will not loose me from it."

There was a knock at the door: a gentleman

had come, said the servant, to see Mr. William Blackburn on very important business.

"To see Willy? What can John Denton want to see my Willy for? He has no right to pick a quarrel with him, you know, Ellen," said Mrs. Blackburn apprehensively.

"John Denton is not quarrelsome, grandmother, whatever folks may choose to say," answered Ellen resolutely, and piqued by the recollection of Lucy's words the previous day; "and if he has important business, it ought to be listened to."

"Well, we all know what the business is about," responded Mrs. Blackburn tartly; "and for my part, I won't see him, and that's flat; and I am sure if Willy was here he would say the same. Go down to the gentleman, Mary, and say Mr. William is from home, and will not return till the evening; and say that I am very sorry, but that I am engaged in Mr. Blackburn's sick-room."

Ellen thought, with indignation, that her grandmother might at least have gone down and spoken civilly to John, who had been always so kind to her; but she was too proud to say so. She sat where she was, following with reproachful eyes the movements of Mrs. Blackburn, who affected to busy herself about the room, but who was in reality sufficiently uncomfortable. She knew in her heart that she was not acting well; but she feared to meet John face to face, who had always had great influence over her, and whose present grounds of complaint she could not gainsay.

Anthony lay with eyes fast closed, but perhaps listening as eagerly as the others.

The maid came up again with a second message. "It was impossible," the gentleman said, "that he could leave the house without making the communication he was charged with to some member of the family."

"Then let Mr. Stanhope see him," said Mrs. Blackburn, "for there's nobody else to do it."

"Stop!" said Ellen decisively; "that shall not be, grandmother. You may treat John as ill as you please, but not falsely. If Mr. Stanhope is to see him, it must be only as grandfather's friend. I have borne enough as it is."

"You are a naughty, disobedient girl," said Mrs. Blackburn angrily. "If your grandfather could only speak, you would not dare to behave so."

"I should be sorry, indeed, for him to think ill of me," said Ellen firmly; "but if you persist in your intention to insult John in the way you speak of, I will go down to him myself, and take his hand—and you will never see me here again, grandmother."

"Do you hear that, Anthony?" cried Mrs. Blackburn with indignation. "Willy always told me that you were wrong in thinking so highly of Ellen; and yet they say you have left all your money to this girl, who flouts you thus away from him."

"I do not want grandfather's money," said Ellen quietly, "as he well knows. I have nev-

er tried to win any thing from him but his love. —If you think it is right that John Denton should be told what is not the truth, grandfather, look at me now and say so with your eyes. —See, he keeps them fast closed! I knew he was not one to approve of what is false, in order to gain his ends."

"Well, well, I will go and see Mr. Stanhope myself, and explain matters," said Mrs. Blackburn in a conciliating tone.

"Nay, grandmother, but I must send the message," said Ellen with quiet determination. —"Come in, Mary" (for the girl had been bidden to wait outside the door). "You are to tell Mr. Denton from your mistress, with her compliments, that no member of the family can see him to-day; but that if the nature of his business will permit him to do so, he can communicate it to Mr. Stanhope, who is in the dining-room."

The servant departed, repeating to herself Miss Ellen's words, for fear she should forget them; and in a minute or two Stanhope's step was heard leaving the apartment below for the drawing-room, into which the visitor had been shown.

John Denton and the young Squire of Curlew Hall had never met since they had stood together on Slogan, eighteen months ago; and during that interval, short as it was, there had been considerable change in both of them. John, always self-reliant and self-composed, had become even more conscious of his own powers, of which his improved position in the world had also afforded ample proof, had he needed such. Instead of the somewhat coarse attire which he had worn as overlooker, he was now dressed, although very plainly, in all respects as a gentleman; and he looked every inch a gentleman, and something more. If there was an absence of that careless ease which sits (not ungracefully) upon those for whom all things have been made smooth from the cradle to manhood, the steady purpose of his face was far from hard or egotistic; while, as he now regarded his rival (as he well knew him in intention to be), a certain chivalrous courtesy lit up his fine features, and gave his tone a gentleness with which genuine feeling could always inspire it, but which, in conventional intercourse, it lacked.

Perhaps the knowledge that Ellen's heart was his, not to be won from him by this man, nor any other, permitted him to be thus generous; or perhaps the straitened, if not desperate circumstances of his rival, of which he had heard reports (unfounded, indeed, though, as it happened, true enough) in Mosedale, affected him with pity, and gave softness to his air and manner.

Herbert Stanhope was even more altered in appearance, though not, as in the other's case, for the better. He had grown paler and thinner of late months; and anxiety and wounded pride had set their marks upon a face that had once evoked Denton's antagonism by its calm insouciance.

The two young men shook hands, if not with cordiality, yet with perfect frankness.

"I am sorry to have been thus obliged to trouble you, Mr. Stanhope," said Denton, "but, since Mr. William Blackburn is not at home, I have no choice; the matter on which I have come here being, unhappily, of the last importance, and not admitting of delay."

"No apology is at all necessary, Mr. Denton; the occupation you have interrupted was only that of making artificial flies; and I assure you that the arrival of any visitor in this place, whatever his business, is quite a godsend to us. I think I should remark, however, that if the matter in question, which you say is so important, has any private and particular reference to Mr. Blackburn, that I have no authority, and indeed must altogether decline to be its recipient."

"The matter I have in hand," said Denton gravely, "touches Mr. William Blackburn only as it affects every one else in this house, yourself included. It is not, I confess, upon his account I have come. I mentioned his name merely as being the most proper person to receive my communication; and yet, if there had been none dearer to me under this roof than he, I should still have thought it my duty to have made it. I must beg of you, first of all, Mr. Stanhope, to take upon trust, with only my word to guarantee it, that I am well acquainted with certain matters connected with my profession, which is that of civil engineer—that I am not one to be mistaken, for instance, about the strength of an embankment. And it is with the acutest sense of the peril in which you and all persons now resident on the Curlew stand from the state of the reservoir on Redmoor, that I have ridden here this day, and with no other object whatsoever."

"Do you mean to tell me that there is any danger of the great embankment on the moor giving way, Mr. Denton?" asked Stanhope, starting to his feet.

"There is, in my opinion, very great danger of it; I should say, indeed, if the wind were east instead of south, as at present, the most imminent danger. In that case, the wind would bring the waves right down upon the embankment; and it is not in a condition to resist it, sir, it is not indeed. I entreat you, I adjure you, Mr. Stanhope, to give heed to what I say."

"There is no fear of my neglecting such a warning, Mr. Denton. Independently of the risk to our friends in this house, and to human life generally, supposing I were so brutal as to disregard it, I have property on the Curlew which, even if this catastrophe should be delayed, must sooner or later be destroyed by it. I will not only do my best to persuade Mr. Blackburn and his family to quit this spot, but I shall not lose a moment in representing to the authorities of Mosedale, with whom I have some influence—"

"That would be time wasted," interrupted Denton solemnly, "and there is, in my judg-

ment, not one hour to waste. I have spoken—I have warned in vain. The directors of the company, in the person of their chairman, have refused to accede to my request that the reservoir should be examined."

"But I thought that matter was looked to last year, and, if I remember rightly, you yourself, Mr. Denton, were the engineer appointed for that very purpose."

"I was, sir; and I made my Report, wherein, as you may read for yourself, I even then contended that not enough had been done for safety. From personal observation of the embankment the last two days, I am confident that mischief of a magnitude such as those people yonder"—and he pointed westward with his hand—"have no conception of, is— Good Heaven! what is that?"

"It is my miller's fowling-piece, if I am not much mistaken," said Stanhope smiling, "though the echoes of the Curlew make it sound somewhat portentous. Did you think it was the bursting of the dam?"

"Do not jest, Mr. Stanhope—do not treat my apprehensions as if they were idle fears. I am a young man, but not ignorant of the things of which I speak. I am as sure of what I now tell you as I am of my own existence."

"But it seems so strange, Mr. Denton, that these directors should not in so important a matter have taken action upon the Report of their own officer."

"I was not their ordinary engineer, sir, but only the substitute for him. My friend Mr. Flywheel delegated me to act for him in the affair, which he did not understand to be of the magnitude and importance which it really was. If he were on the spot now, I would stake my existence that his view would be the same as mine—that he would have the dam blown up this very hour, so as to decrease the water-pressure. There was a crack in the embankment last year that was sufficient to admit a penknife; there is one to-day in which I can almost place my hand."

"But why is not Mr. Flywheel at his post?"

"He is abroad, sir, employed on an Italian railway. I would to Heaven he were here."

"But you in his absence are his representative, are you not?"

"I was, sir," answered Denton, with flashing eyes, "until yesterday. But when I found I was not listened to by the Reservoir Board, I at once threw up my appointment. To hold it for another day, would be, in my judgment, to be accessory before the fact to— But Heaven only knows to what; there is no limit to the ruin which may happen."

"Then you are not come here in any official capacity, Mr. Denton?"

"In none whatever, sir; though, of course, if my profession were not what it is I should feel no cause for these apprehensions. I have lately been appointed resident engineer on the Mosedale Railway, or I should not have been in the town at all. If, if"—and the young man hesi-

tated, and crimsoned to the forehead—"if circumstances had not brought one that is dearer to me than life itself into this perilous place, I should not perhaps have visited Redmoor at all. God grant that I have not done so, even now, in vain. You will not neglect this warning, Mr. Stanhope—promise me that; or beware lest the guilt of blood—the destruction of man and woman, as well as the ruin of hearth and homestead—should lie at your door."

It was curious to see how, as the one seemed to grow more earnest and impassioned with every word, the other became more calm, and even incredulous.

"I will certainly put our friends here on their guard, Mr. Denton. I am sure it is most kind of you."

"It is nothing of that sort, Mr. Stanhope," broke in the other. "You do not say it is kindness to warn a bather who can not swim, of a current which you know will sweep him to his death. It is my duty, and nothing more. You, sir, can have no miserable reasons, founded on a few pounds of cost, to refuse to listen to me, such as have made those in Mosedale deaf and blind; nor, as I trust, have you any personal prejudice so strong against me as to make you discredit my words because they are mine."

"Indeed, Mr. Denton," returned Stanhope, flushing in his turn, "you do me no more than justice. It is impossible to misunderstand your motive, or to fail to be moved by such generous earnestness; you may depend upon it, so far as my influence extends in this household, your warning shall have all the attention which it deserves."

"Thank you, Mr. Stanhope, thank you," said Denton fervently, as he held out his hand.

"You have taken a weight from off my mind such as I can scarcely bear to think of, even now that it is gone.—Good-bye, sir; and God bless you."

Stanhope accompanied him to the door, and saw him mount and turn his horse's head towards Redmoor. "Are you going to take another look, then, at the embankment yonder?"

"Yes, Mr. Stanhope, though it is useless. I am also going to Curlew Mill to give my warning there. I am not permitted to avert this peril, it seems; but, so far as in me lies, I must strive to abate its consequences;" and with one look up at the sky, where the light clouds were floating leisurely to eastward, he shook the reins and cantered up the gorge.

CHAPTER XXXV.

KNOWING THE WORST.

"I AM sorry you and Mr. Denton did not agree this morning," said Lucy to her father, as they sat in their home at Mosedale on the evening of the day on which we last saw her: "he seems a very straightforward and unselfish young man."

"Does he?" returned Mr. Waller vacantly, and passing his hand wearily across his forehead. "I really paid but little attention to him in other respects, except that he seemed to be very fidgety and importunate."

"That's because he feels every thing that he says, papa; his every word seems to come from his heart."

"It would be better if it came from his head when he talks about business matters," observed Mr. Waller dryly.—"Did he say any thing more about that confounded reservoir, Lucy, this afternoon?"

"No, papa; but I met him on horseback, and I fancy he was riding out to Redmoor, to take another look at the embankment. I hope and trust you are right in the matter, papa, dear: it would be so terrible if what Mr. Denton is so apprehensive of should come to pass."

"Yes, yes; I am right enough, Lucy; I must be right, for did not Flywheel tell me so himself? This Mr. Denton's Report, he said, made far too much of the matter last year; and I have no doubt he is again alarming himself unnecessarily. A young man always likes to make out a serious case out of any thing in which he first gets employment; it is only natural; and I bear no grudge against him whatever on account of the fuss he made. His throwing his appointment in my face, indeed, was petulant enough; it looked very fine, but it was not much of a sacrifice. He has a good salary from the railway company, I am told; and is likely to get on in the world. I dare say, so far as means go, he will soon be quite as good a match for your friend Ellen as Mr. Stanhope. I don't wonder that a sensible girl like her should prefer a man with a steadily increasing income, to one who has scarcely any thing but his good blood to recommend him. It is not every young lady who has the chance of securing a man who is rich and also well born."

This was a subject not pleasing to Lucy, and she made an effort to avert its continuance.

"But if all Mr. Denton wants is to have the embankment thoroughly inspected, why should it not be done, papa? Cross-examination, as I have heard you say, is the key that lets out the truth; and is it not something the same with inanimate objects as with human beings?"

"It can't be done, my dear," sighed Mr. Waller; "for, to be candid with you, I can't afford it."

"Is it so very expensive, then? Mr. Denton said it would cost only a few pounds."

"Nor would it, Lucy, so far as the mere work was concerned; and my share of the expense would indeed be insignificant enough. But once let the folks here know that the reservoir needs repair, and down go the shares, as they did last year. Since you have pressed me on this matter, my darling, I will take the opportunity to tell you exactly how my affairs stand—if those can be said to stand at all, which the breath of rumor might topple over in utter ruin."

"I am quite aware, dear papa, you are in sad

straits," said Lucy faintly; "I have always entreated you to let us live more in accordance with our actual means. The luxuries with which we are surrounded have given me no pleasure since I came to know the shifts to which you have been put to maintain us in them. I would rather give up every thing to-morrow, and live ever so plainly, than remain in our present false position."

"You don't know what 'giving up every thing' means, Lucy," said Mr. Waller gloomily, "nor can any one guess, who has not put it into practice: no rich man, and certainly no rich woman, has any real conception of actual poverty. You have the same idea of it as your would-be Sister of Mercy has of tending the sick in hospital; she fancies only wasted features with grateful looks on them; she has no idea of what would really meet her eye—and her nose."

"I don't know about abject poverty, papa," said Lucy simply; "that is, I don't know so much as I ought to know, though it always seemed to me, even in that case, that a little care and taste—"

Mr. Waller cut her short with a bitter smile. "Taste!" cried he; "yes, that would mend matters indeed; you would have cut flowers and a musical-box in every two-roomed house, I dare say."

"Fly gallery, Florence, gilds my humble walls,
And my low roof the Vatican recalls."

You and the man who wrote those lines had much the same conception of cottage-life."

"Well, papa, I know at least how our lodge-keeper and his daughter live; and Heaven knows that I would gladly exchange places with them."

"Yes, Lucy; but even if I were adapted for a lodge-keeper (which I confess I do not think I am), that is unfortunately not the question. There is no middle course for us left; there is no alternative for us but this—either the life we are now living, or positive beggary—destitution. There is not one brick of this house, nor one article which it contains that we can with strictness call our own. I thought that I had hinted as much to you already."

"No, papa, I did not know that."

Lucy was very white, but her voice was firm. It was ill news indeed, but she was preparing herself for worse tidings, which she saw by her father's face were on the way.

"Yes, dear Lucy, the time has come when I must use plain words. Those reservoir shares are all—absolutely all—that I now possess in the world; and I must sell them to-morrow to meet a bill which will then fall due, unless it is met by some one else."

"By some one else? I do not understand."

"William Blackburn's name is on the back of it."

"Oh papa, did you persuade him to do that on my—through any hope—" She leaned back breathless in her chair, and gazed upon him with terrified eyes.

"I made no promise, darling, certainly not.

But I did say, as indeed I thought, that time might have its influence upon you in his favor. He was very reasonable—he said that he was content to wait. He did not wish to press matters at all, and I am sure he will not do so; and in time, who knows but that fortune may befriend us. I have many an iron in the fire, and though I have been unfortunate, of late, that can not last forever. On the other hand, what is it makes this match so repugnant to you, which many a young girl in the county—

“Do you ask me that, papa, who know this man?”

Mr. Waller cast down his eyes, and fumbled with trembling fingers at his watch-chain. “You can not have a husband made to order, Lucy: there is something to be said against every man, if you come to that.”

“And do you really ask me, father, to take William Blackburn for my husband, for my companion—for my master all my life?”

“No, only for all his life,” returned Mr. Waller boldly. “I would fain have kept silence upon this matter, but, after all, it is a mere conventional reticence. We take into account the chance of death in every marriage settlement, and why not in our considerations of a match, as now? William Blackburn’s life is not worth five years’ purchase: Mr. Allcase told me so himself. He has undermined—I mean, when he was abroad, and isolated, as it were, poor fellow! from his family and friends, he was driven to take more to drink than was good for him: and though he sees the evil of it now—you must yourself have noticed a marked change in him of late for the better in all respects; he is certainly grown more social and pleasant in his manners—well as I was saying, though he is so improved in his habits, the mischief has been done: he is bound to be a short-lived man.”

“And how many years, father,” asked Lucy in hollow tones, “would it take a man like that to break a heart like mine, think you?”

“He shall never do it, my girl; he shall never have the chance of doing it,” replied Mr. Waller vehemently. “If you are not happy with him, you shall come back to me. Do you think that I could not manage that and him? I tell you I could wind that fellow round my finger, compel him into doing what I pleased, and become his master wholly, if only I once got free from the meshes of this net. I feel like some strong swimmer whose limbs are caught by the lithe weed beneath, and rendered useless: if it be but severed, he rises to the surface buoyant as ever; but else he is dragged down and drowned. Nay, worse than he, for the drowned man is buried, and there’s an end; but of dishonored bankrupt *me* they will make a shameful spectacle, and at their shouts and jeers my daughter may well shudder, since one word of hers might have saved me, and yet she would not speak it.”

“Then I will speak it, father,” cried Lucy suddenly. “You shall never say that I hesitated to make the choice between my happiness

and yours—I will tell this man that since you have sold me to him, I will ratify my part of the bargain.”

“My dear Lucy,” said Mr. Waller, taking his daughter’s icy hand within his own and smoothing it fondly, “this is really a most unpleasant view to take of the matter. You must forgive me—but it is not good taste—and it is also most painful to myself. I have only done what any man in the county would have been glad to have done in securing you this good position, although I confess I was impelled to it by cruel necessity. If I were a rich man I would afford you the indulgence of wedding whom you pleased, and welcome; but as it is, the luxury is not within my means. I sincerely wish, for both our sakes, that it were, my dear. Then it is not as if I was tearing you from the arms of one on whom you have set your heart; you know that I was far from offering the least obstacle when—”

She held her hand up for a moment pleadingly. “Pray, spare me that, papa, since I have promised to do your bidding. Why torture me further?”

“Torture you, my child? Heaven forbid!” said Mr. Waller earnestly. Deeply moved by his daughter’s wretchedness, he was now characteristically bent upon showing her that, after all, matters might not turn out as she feared. “I was obliged to put the whole matter before you—to let you see the extent of the sacrifice (as you persist in viewing it) which might possibly be demanded, but to tell the worst is always to exclude much that is hopeful, something that is even probable. As I said before, William Blackburn is in no hurry to wed; nor, indeed, would it be fitting that he should be. Six months at the very least must elapse, out of respect for his late wife. I should insist, even if it were not his own desire, upon so much of delay myself. And in six months,—why, you don’t know what a man like me can compass, if he has but room to turn about in: you don’t know what time can do, my child.”

“I know what time has done for me papa,” said Lucy bitterly, “but fifteen months of time! Heaven help me!” and then at last the silent tears began to fall.

Mr. Waller rose, stooped over her white face, and kissing her forehead, left the room without a word. He understood what his daughter felt, and perhaps even sympathized with her more than many a less selfish man would have done. The faculty of insight untrammelled by the weakness of sentiment, had made Mr. Waller a strong man, and armed him for the battle of life. If in every case he did not know exactly what should be said, he always knew when he had said enough.

Lucy sat where she was for hours, gazing vacantly before her, through eyes now tear-dimmed with the memories of the past, now coldly fixed in contemplation of the future; busy with the dream of what might have been, and with the harsh realities of what might be.

One circumstance only, to which indeed her father had alluded, though really with no other intention than to diminish her sorrow, by placing it at a distance from her view, gave her some spark of comfort. There was still time before her. William Blackburn had never actually proposed to her; and she knew him far too well to suppose that any delicate feeling with regard to his late wife had caused this reticence. There was doubtless some material reason which turned the scale with him in favor of delay: perhaps he was waiting to see in what position he would be left by his father's will, and desired to hold himself in a condition to cry "off," should circumstances induce him to look for a bride elsewhere. Never was reflection, so wounding to a young lady's self-esteem, so gladly entertained and cherished.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

MR. WILLIAM'S AUTOGRAPH.

SCARCELY had the young engineer passed out of sight upon his way to Curlew Mill, when the carriage bringing Mr. Waller and his daughter to spend the promised "long day" at the cottage made its appearance on the bridge. Stanhope saw it with satisfaction, as he stood at the dining-room window pondering in his mind the communication he had just received, and in some doubt as to the course he should pursue in consequence. While his late visitor had been with him, Denton's earnest manner and pleading words had had more or less of weight with him, but his *laissez aller* nature was antagonistic to all press and promptitude, and now that he was alone, he already began to think that the other might have overstated his case through professional enthusiasm, if not through pique at his advice having been disregarded by his superiors. It was a serious thing to terrify the little household, with its prostrate head, by fears that, after all, might be without foundation, and he gladly welcomed the arrival of astute and practical Mr. Waller, as one who could him give good advice in such an emergency.

"I did not expect Miss Lucy would have inveigled you here so early," said he, when that young lady had gone up stairs with Ellen to take off her out-door gear; "but, as it happens, you are come in the very nick of time, for I want you to help me out of a difficulty."

Every thing of difficulty took with Mr. Waller a pecuniary shape: was it possible that this young man was so hard pushed for money that he was going to ask a loan even of him, of whose embarrassments he was doubtless not altogether ignorant? Of course he could have lent him nothing; but it was disagreeable to him to have to refuse any thing point-blank. He therefore at once began *more suo* to anticipate the catastrophe. "Yes, I am earlier than I thought to be; but the fact is, there was a confounded fellow worrying me about a claim, which, just at present, it would be very inconvenient to me to

satisfy; and I was really glad to get bodily away from him. There are some creditors who seem to be quite cannibalish, and ready to eat one alive."

The real explanation of his early visit was that he did not wish Lucy to come without him. Notwithstanding her promise of the previous night, he mistrusted her fortitude, and thought it best that she should have his personal support in the society of Mr. William, whom she was now to meet for the first time as her acknowledged suitor. The business he had to arrange with that gentleman in the course of the day was exceedingly likely to bring matters to a head, and would indeed have necessitated his yesterday's plain speaking to Lucy, had not the discussion about Denton led to the question by another channel.

"Don't talk to me of creditors, my good friend," said Stanhope laughing; "it's like speaking of ropes in the house of a gentleman who is to be hanged. But that reminds me we are not to be hanged in this house, but drowned, it seems. The embankment on Redmoor is far from safe, I hear; and the reservoir— But, there; what a fool I am about all these business matters; why, now I remember, you are connected with that thing yourself."

"Connected with it, sir?" said Mr. Waller with a smile upon his shrewd face, that masked considerable trepidation; for if this news had really got about, it might have the same ill effect as the official inspection he had refused to permit. "I am very glad to say I am connected with it, since the shares are at a high premium, and I hold a good sheaf of them. The reservoir, sir? Why, *Le réservoir c'est moi*. I am myself the chairman of the Board."

"Of course you are; I remember hearing you say so last year."

An indifferent joke about the information having only gone in at one ear to go out at another, was Mr. Waller's reply.

"Ah, but I can tell you it is no laughing matter, Waller. I do really believe there's something wrong. I never saw a man more earnest and confident in his manner in my life than Mr. Denton was this morning."

"Oh, Mr. Denton was your informant, was he?" returned the other with irritation, yet secretly well pleased to find that the news had come from a source he was already prepared for. "You are not aware, I suppose, that that very young gentleman, who at best was only the *locum tenens* of a much abler and wiser man, now holds no official appointment with us whatever?"

"He told me so much as that," said Stanhope; "but I understood him to say he had resigned the post."

"Well, I suppose he has a right to call it a resignation, if he so pleases," said Mr. Waller coldly. "But we should certainly not have retained him, even had he wished it. I don't say that he is not an able young fellow enough, but he is too full of fancies for a profession so practical as he has chosen. Flywheel, who has

a European reputation, quite laughed at his Report last year; and I don't imagine that the six months' interval has rendered him more logical and judicious. So he has been down here already, has he, with that cock-and-bull story which he told me yesterday? Well, considering he is no longer in our employment, I think it would have been better taste in him to hold his tongue. What the deuce business is it of his, I should like to know?"

"Nay, but surely it is his business, considering we live here in this swan's nest upon the river itself, to let us know if he thinks the reservoir may come down upon us any morning, or even at night, which would be less agreeable still."

"My dear Stanhope," said Mr. Waller, throwing his palms outwards—an action which he had always found of service in convincing the mercantile community—"do, pray, let us take a reasonable view of this matter. Am I—a practical man, and yet, I hope, not without some human feeling—the sort of person likely to let life and property be endangered to the frightful extent to which it would be exposed if there was really any fear of such a catastrophe as you hint at? Why, my own place at Mosedale—let alone this cottage, with its little nest of friends—would be among the first to suffer, for it lies low, and close to the river; and you will at least grant that I have a sharp eye to my own interests."

"Perhaps it is insured," answered Stanhope laughing. "I wish my mill was."

"There, now, you are treating the matter as it deserves to be treated," said Mr. Waller approvingly. "The danger, I do solemnly assure you" (and it must be added that the speaker believed what he said, because he wished to believe it), "has no existence whatever, except in the brain of this sucking engineer."

"Still, it must have taken very firm root *there*," observed Stanhope, not quite convinced, "for him to have ridden down here this morning, with no other purpose than to put us on our guard."

"Are you quite sure he had no other purpose, as he had some other *attraction* to this spot?" said Mr. Waller shrewdly. "For my part—though," added he hurriedly, "of course there are exceptions—I don't believe in the disinterestedness of young men."

Stanhope's color heightened. "Disinterestedness you think, then, is only a product of mature years, Mr. Waller? Well, that is as it may be; but certainly men of your age have a better reputation for sagacity than your juniors. I suppose we must place ourselves in your hands, and disregard this young fellow's warning altogether; else I had certainly meant to speak to Mrs. Blackburn on the subject."

"My good sir, you would surely not have been so injudicious; it would have put her beside herself with foolish terrors; she would have been for getting her husband and the whole household out of the cottage at once, and placing

them on the most elevated spot in the country. She is far from well, my daughter tells me, as it is; and, indeed, we are planning to take her away with us to Mosedale for a day or two, if she could only be persuaded to leave Miss Ellen in sole charge of our sick friend."

"But one must give some reason for Mr. Denton's having called this morning."

"Yes, yes; but you may leave that to me, Stanhope. It will be much better so; because, you see, any reference to his visit places you—considering this gentleman's pretensions in a certain quarter—in a somewhat delicate position. I will tell my daughter, who is already acquainted with Denton's ideas upon the reservoir matter, to inform Miss Ellen of the whole affair."

"Then I wash my hands of the matter altogether," said the other, glad to close the question. Never before had Mr. Waller made direct reference to his young friend's matrimonial scheme—he was too well bred, or rather too much man of the world to do so, unless his own interest seemed, as now, to urgently demand it; and the allusion made Stanhope wince. Mr. Waller was made of sterner stuff.

"Where is our young friend, Mr. William, to-day?" inquired he gayly.

"He is gone fishing down Mosedale way; I wonder you did not see him as you came along. He talked of being out all day, but I fancy he'll be back at luncheon-time."

"I hope so, indeed," said Mr. Waller involuntarily, and taking out his watch. "I rather wanted to have a word with him before the post goes out."

"Upon business?" inquired Stanhope dryly. "Yes, upon his own business. Moffat, who can't get on with him, asks me occasionally to put this and that before him." This was true; and Mr. Waller knew that Stanhope was aware of it. "For my part," continued the former, "I find little difficulty with our friend. And certainly of late he seems to me to be getting more practicable and like other people—don't you think so?"

"Within the last day or two there has, without doubt, been a noticeable change in him," answered Stanhope coldly, "otherwise I should not call his manners conciliatory."

Mr. Waller smiled: he knew that his companion was making reprisals for his late allusion.

"Manners," rejoined he, "are, after all, but the result of early training, which is in no case within one's own power. They may make the man; but it is birth and acres—provided only that they are unencumbered—which make the county gentleman."

"Talk of the devil," said Stanhope with irritation; "here is Mr. William coming through the bridge."

"How are you, Blackburn? Good-morning to you," cried Mr. Waller cheerily. "What sport have you had? What have you got?"

"Nothing," grunted Mr. William, awaking desponding echoes.

"Not even an appetite for luncheon?" laughed Mr. Waller. "Come, let us hope you've got that. Stanhope here was just remarking you would be pretty sure to be back at feeding-time. It is then that one has best chance of fish."

"Oh, fishing is all rubbish. This old fool here took me to a place which he said would be like a stewpond, and where he had dropped four quarts of worms, for which he charged two shillings; and there wasn't a blessed fin."

"It's all them poachers, Mr. William," pleaded the professional angler; "they comes up from Mosedale every other night in the week."

"It's your business to catch 'em, sir," returned his master, "or, at all events, to see that I catch fish."

"But then you broke the rod, Mr. William," remonstrated the other—"Mr. Richard's rod, as has whipped Curlew for five years, and killed a most a ton of trout!"

"Never mind, Blackburn; spare the rod and spoil the stream, says Solomon," observed Mr. Waller encouragingly.

"Oh, I don't mind," said William sulkily, "whether Solomon said so or not.—Come, put me ashore here, old Groundbait;" which was done accordingly. Mr. William's time was of course much too valuable to be consumed in the foolish custom of handshaking, but he nodded graciously to both his friends.

"The idea," said he, appealing to their sympathies, "of that fellow's charging sixpence a quart for worms!"

"Frogs are much dearer, my good sir, in France," said Mr. Waller, who, notwithstanding his boast of "getting on so well" with this county gentleman, was always shooting over his head, and irritating him by opposition, when intending to conciliate him by badinage.

"Then all I can say is fools are plentiful in France; and I never want to go there," growled Mr. William.

"Oh, then, he never has been in France, after all," thought Mr. Waller. "Come, I've picked up *something*. A day will come, my young friend, yet when I shall have you entirely under my thumb;" and he smiled upon him in the most genial and unaffected manner.

"You have not come without Miss Lucy, have you?" inquired Mr. William suddenly, and in a manner which, if complimentary to the person sought for, was certainly not courteous to the person found.

"No, no," said Mr. Waller, smiling; "I know too well what sort of a welcome an old fellow like me would receive at the hands of you young gentlemen, unless he brought some one else to recommend him."

"Just so," said Mr. William bluntly. "Where is she, then?"

"The young ladies are up stairs with your mother," observed Stanhope, speaking for the first time.—"Perhaps before they come down you had better get that business over, Waller,

with Blackburn—at least, I mean, don't mind me: I can stay here among the roses."

"A proper place for such a pretty fellow!" said Mr. Waller. "I am much obliged to you for reminding me of the matter, which else I do believe I should have clean forgotten.—Yes, I want to have a few words with you, Blackburn. Just come into the dining-room for five minutes, will you?"

"Well, be alive," said William, when they had stepped within, and the other had carefully closed the glass door, "for the fact is I want a cigar; and if I have one in any room of this wretched hovel they make such a fuss about the smoke getting up stairs. I hope you are going to tell me that that fellow Moffat is inclined to be less pigheaded?"

"Well, yes, I think I shall be able to bring him round; though, without doubt, your father's condition makes matters uncommonly embarrassing."

"You have not got the money, then?" said the other in a tone of disappointment.

"No, I have not got the money at present," said Mr. Waller quietly. "It is not about that that I wished to speak to you. It is about that bill."

"What! *your* bill? Oh, that explains matters. I thought you showed yourself deucedly interested in my affairs. Well, it falls due to-morrow. You do not expect *me* to meet it, I hope?"

"Well, I am afraid I must, Blackburn."

"And how the devil am I to do it? I tell you, if I gave you every farthing I could scrape together, including the purse I've saved for a little fling in London, which I am sure I deserve, after having been moped up in a sick-house for half a year—I say, even in that case (which I promise you is not very likely to happen), I could not muster such a sum."

"My dear Blackburn," said Mr. Waller, smiling, "you could muster ten such sums with as many strokes of your pen."

"What! by signing my name? Oh, I dare say. You have had one of my autographs already, and that is enough. I tell you, once for all, that I will not lend myself to help you to another shilling unless I see my way to the *quid pro quo*."

There was a long pause, during which the last speaker looked at the other significantly.

"The security you ask for is up stairs," said Mr. Waller at last.

"I know *that* well enough," answered William; "but I must have it here—if not in my hand, at all events assured to me."

"I have spoken to Lucy for you, William—I pleaded your cause with her only last night; upon my word and honor, I did."

"I don't doubt it," said the other coolly. "I know you are upon my side in the matter, because it is the side on which your bread is buttered; but it is not to gain you for a father-in-law that I am so particularly anxious, but to gain your daughter for a wife. When she herself

has said to me: 'Ask papa,' then I shall be satisfied."

"And that she shall do some day," said Mr. Waller cheerfully. "Indeed, between ourselves, she has promised as much already."

"Some day means nothing," said William resolutely. "Lucy herself must tell me to-day that she is ready to become Mrs. William Blackburn."

"To-day! That is impossible, sir," cried Mr. Waller.

"Then I shall find it equally impossible to-day to put my name to paper," said the other with determination; "and it seems to me that you can't wait."

Mr. Waller's usually tranquil face was greatly agitated; anxiety and rage alike made prey of him. It was true that he could not wait; but he had had no idea that William also would be so urgent. Whenever the subject of his marriage had been hinted at before, he had shown no sign of impatience.

"It is a harsh thing, Blackburn, to demand to have my daughter's answer from her own lips, under circumstances like yours, so soon. But my necessity, as you observe, is great and pressing. If you are really fixed in your resolve"—

"You need not say 'if.' I am."

"Then I will ask Lucy, as a favor to myself, to waive those feelings of delicacy, which, though you do not seem to possess them, should actuate you far more than her."

William stared at him with dogged wonder; he had no idea to what he was alluding; the recollection of how short a time had elapsed since his supposed bereavement, did not even occur to him.

"I say I will ask my daughter to forget what you have not chosen to remember; and to give you her promise that, when the fit time comes, she will become your wife."

"The fit time!" returned the other fiercely; "what the deuce do you mean by that? I think I have been put off and put off sufficiently long as it is; but it's no use mincing matters with you, I find. When she says 'yes' she must also name the day, sir: any day she pleases, of course; but it must be a pretty early one, I can tell her—within six weeks at farthest."

"Six weeks?" exclaimed Mr. Waller angrily, for every moment of this man's companionship made the idea of his daughter's marriage with him more hateful, and the sense of his own helplessness more galling. "You must have lost your wits, Blackburn, as you have surely lost your memory. Do you know how many days it is since you were free to wed?"

William had risen from his chair, in token that he had given his *ultimatum*, but he now sat hurriedly down again; his face had turned deadly pale, and his brow was overspread with dew; his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth, and when he got it free, it was only to moisten his suddenly parched lips. As he sat there, damp and venomous-looking, with protruding eyes, it came involuntarily into the mind of his father-

in-law elect how like he was to that order of reptiles which is called Batrachian.

"I am glad to see at least that the recollection of your late bereavement moves you," said Mr. Waller gravely. "Doubtless your affection for Lucy may be some excuse for your oblivion of the past; but still, sir, these common decencies of life, or at least of good society, should never be forgotten. Your proposal shocked me, as you saw; nor could it, believe me, fail to shock others also. To marry so soon after your wife's death, would not only provoke antagonism to yourself, but to Lucy, and would prevent her from being of that social service to you with your neighbors, of which you stand so much in need. Nay, sir, I do not hesitate to say that any such hasty marriage would provoke the most injurious reflections and inquiries respecting your late wife. How, it will be asked, did he treat *her*, and when and where— But there, I see I have said enough, William. I am sorry to have pained you so, but your most injudicious proposition left me no alternative. See, there are the young ladies in the garden. Now, if you still wish to see Lucy—"

Mr. William shook his head. "No, no; not now—another time. I don't feel well; the sun upon the river has made me faint and shaky."

"It always has the same effect upon me," said Mr. Waller cheerfully. "If you don't feel quite equal to run your eye over this little document, I'll read it over to you. There; if you will be so good as to put your name where my finger is—in your usual hand-writing as much as you can, please. Dear me, your *ars* shaky!—Thank you. And now let's go out and join the ladies; I shall be glad to discuss that other little matter with you whenever you please."

But Mr. William was in no mood to join the ladies, but withdrew himself to his own room, perhaps for horizontal, more probably for spirituous, refreshment; and Mr. Waller himself remained where he was, busy with his own reflections.

"It's my belief that fellow's half-cracked," soliloquized he. "If his heart was not softened just now, it must be his brain that's going. All-case is right enough: he won't last long. Gad, I almost think it would have been better to let him have his way, for, after six weeks' time, there is no saying whether he may be alive. And yet I don't think I could ever let my dear girl marry such a creature even for a day. I am sure he treated that wife of his ill—*very* ill, or his conscience would never have stung him as it did just now. He's a bad fellow, and a deuced ugly one too sometimes: he looked more like a toad than a man when I began to talk to him.—Yes, my dear, I'm coming;" and he kissed his hand to Lucy, who was looking furtively towards the dining-room window.—"Well, I've got his name here for a thousand pounds, if they will only believe it to his name, and that's a good morning's work, at all events. There's something wrong about his late wife, that's clear. I wonder whether the screw lies there, after all,

to which Master Stanhope yonder applies his chisel with such effect?—What a lovely day you have provided for us, Miss Ellen, and how charmingly your little bower on Curlew looks!”

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE TEMPTATION.

If the sentimental emotions evoked in Mr. William Blackburn with reference to his late wife were more powerful than we might have been led to expect, they were not, on the other hand, lasting, for, after a very brief retirement, he came forth and joined the rest of the party in the garden without the least sign of his recent depression; nay, he was even in high spirits—clumsily brisk,—grotesquely genial, like some wild animal whose vagaries would not be unamusing, if one could only be certain how they would end. “Is this, now,” thought Mr. Waller, smiling encouragingly at his young friend, “merely the effect of his favorite stimulant, or does he wish to show me that what I have just seen in him was only a momentary weakness?”

Lucy also secretly regarded him with a shuddering interest she had never experienced before. She had long been in possession of her father's scheme, of course, but he had not directly confided it to her. She had not pictured to herself the actual possibility of this man's being her lord and master. Doubtless, the reader has seen a parallel case, for there are many such in good society (indeed they are most numerous in the best); but if not, let him imagine how much more noteworthy the gambols of the Greater Ape would appear to him in its cage in the Regent's Park, if it were enacted that, after a certain time, the creature should exercise a personal authority over *him*. She wondered what arrangement had just been made by her father with this man in yonder room, and augured ill for herself from Mr. William's boisterous mirth. Ellen, on her part, was scarcely in lighter mood than her friend; she had told Lucy of Denton's visit that morning—but that young lady was at present unable to enlighten her as to its cause, and this filled her with vague alarms. Stanhope was, for some reason best known to himself, by no means at his ease—nor had he been so of late when Ellen and Lucy were present, so that on Mr. Waller and William devolved the task that day of making conversation, and what is vulgarly called “doing the agreeable.” It was as though for some evening party, too fashionable to amuse themselves, the most accomplished singer or elegant pianist had been engaged, and also a gentleman whose only art was to stick pins into the fleshy part of his legs, or draw yards of tape out of his mouth—although it must be granted that Mr. William was certainly no conjurer. It would have been much more difficult, however, even under less adverse circumstances, to make time pass at the Fishery than at the Manor. There was not room and verge enough in their

present picturesque but contracted position to do as they pleased; all were thrown together in that narrow space, and, except for the malady of the sea, might almost as well have been fellow-passengers ship-bored, compared with whom all companies ashore, even in their quarter of an hour before dinner, or when enjoying a “little music” afterwards, are hilarity itself.

When the postman came that afternoon, who took away with him a letter (with an enclosure) in Mr. Waller's fine flowing and yet business hand, he brought one of a different appearance for Stanhope. To judge by its superscription, which was “Mr. Stanhope, Esq., care of Mr. Blackburn, Esq.,” it had been written with a skewer, and excited, in that dearth of subjects of interest, quite a topic of conversation as to who such an eccentric correspondent might be.

Mr. Waller opined that it was a love-letter from some young lady of rank whose education had been neglected.

“More likely,” observed dull William cunningly, “it's from one of his turf friends.”

“Who uses, characteristically, a horse's shoe-nail instead of a steel pen,” added Stanhope good-humoredly.

He read it and crumpled it up in his pocket, carelessly saying that Blackburn was so far right—that it was a begging-letter from poor old Jerry the card-seller, who had come to grief.

“Why, you don't mean to say that any one begs of *you*?” was Mr. William's coarse rejoinder; and so the matter ended.

But when the long afternoon came to its close at last, and the visitors had departed, taking Mrs. Blackburn with them—whom they had persuaded with difficulty to be their guest for the next day at least—Stanhope took no further pains to hide that something had annoyed him deeply; and the more he showed it, the higher Mr. William's spirits rose. As he watched him involuntarily take out again and again the missive he had received, only to thrust it back into his pocket with a muttered curse, he chuckled to himself and whistled merrily. “Uncle Dean has done the trick,” thought he. Oh yes, it's a begging-letter, right enough; but it has none of old Jerry's whine in it. It's a stand-and-deliver affair, from one of his Goodwood friends, I'll take my davy.”

And for once in his life at least Mr. William might have made a statement upon oath and yet not committed perjury. It was a letter of the “You-call-yourself-a-gentleman” sort, which those who owe debts of honor to persons of no honor, and which they are unable to pay, ought to make up their minds not to wince at; but it galled its present recipient to the quick. “As for your being abroad, I know it's all Dawlish's gammon,” ran one of its sentences, “and I for one am not going to be fobbed off with promises. It's true that I can't get my rights by law; but if Stokes and I—for he's my pardner—don't get our cool four thousand within the week, mind this, I'll post you.”

Presently, as they sat in the twilight over their

brandy-and-water and cigars, at the open window, a boat glided slowly by up the stream.

"Now, I'll stake my life," cried William, who was always offering this tremendous wager (as in his own idea at least it was) upon the most trifling events, "those two young rogues there are after night-poaching."

"Very likely," answered Stanhope curtly. "I don't care a farthing whether they are or not."

"But it's my river, sir, every yard of it, from here to Mosedale."

"Then I wish 'em luck," said Stanhope, draining his glass, and mixing himself another.

"I say, what the deuce is the matter with you, old fellow?" inquired William, always conciliatory, when another showed signs of fight. "You seem uncommon down upon your luck to-night."

"Well, my luck is rather down upon me," returned the other bitterly—"my usual luck, that is."

"Bosh! what have you got to complain of?—a handsome, gentlemanly young fellow, whom all the girls are wild for, with a fine house and an old name, and whose estate, if it is a little dipped—"

Mr. William stopped; he could not quite conceal the delight he took in thus torturing his friend, and the other's eyes flashed fire.

"I have no estate, sir, as perhaps you know," said he desperately. "Read *that*," and he tossed him over Mr. Stokes's pardner's letter.

"What an impudent scoundrel!" ejaculated the other, when he had mastered the contents. "Of course"—and here he lit a fresh cigar, as an excuse for not meeting his companion's gaze—"of course you'll pay the beggar off at once, and have done with him? And yet four thousand pounds is a large sum to have to pay all of a sudden."

"To me, at least, it is," said Stanhope sternly. "Indeed, I have not got the money."

"Not got the money?" exclaimed the other, raising his bushy eyebrows. "Dear me! What will you do, then? Bolt?"

"No; it has not come to that yet, I hope. I must raise this sum how I can. Redmoor Firgrove is still mine to sell, and that will fetch it; and in the mean time I must trouble you to advance it to me."

"The trouble would be a pleasure," said William coolly, "but, upon my life, I have not fifty pounds I can call my own. If you had asked me at breakfast-time, I might have lent you a little more, but my father-in-law that is to be was so very pressing this morning, that I had to lend it to *him*."

"Is this really true, Blackburn? Can you not help me in this strait at all? If you will only make the advance, I will pay you ten—twenty per cent. You know that I am one to keep my word."

"This gentleman here does not seem to know it," said Stanhope carelessly, pointing to the letter; "although I dare say what he writes is all lies."

"No; it's true," said Stanhope hoarsely, taking no notice, in his fierce excitement, of the other's irritating manner. "I believe I have been the greatest fool alive;" and he ground his teeth so that the cigar fell from his lips, bitten clean through.

"I know one way, and only one, by which you may still be a rich man," said William slowly.

"To-morrow?" cried the other bitterly.

"Yes, to-morrow; that is, as soon as you like." Stanhope shook his head.

"It is not," continued the other, "the way which you have in your mind, but another way."

"What do you mean?" There was something in Blackburn's voice which, wretched as Stanhope felt, gave him a thrill of horror.

"Well, I'll tell you, upon two conditions. First, that you don't fly into one of your foolish passions—enough to make a fellow's blood run cold to look at you; and secondly, that, whether you agree to my proposal or not, you'll keep it a secret—never breathe it to any human being—never speak about it again, even to myself, unless I ask you."

"You are mystery itself, sir," said Stanhope, forcing a laugh; "but I have no objection to agree to both your terms. It is impossible to make me more savage than I am—"

"I am not so sure of that," interrupted William. "When you happen to take a different view of a thing from what another man takes, who is perhaps as good as yourself, only without the same finical notions, I have seen you burst out at him like a—like an unchained bull-dog."

"Oh, you are afraid of wounding my honor, Mr. Blackburn, I perceive. Well, I think, after that infernal letter, I can bear most things. Pray, don't consider my feelings."

"Very good. And you'll keep it quiet?"

"Certainly. Why not? Secret as the dead who lie in their graves—"

"Never you mind *them*," interrupted the other hastily.—"You'll never speak about the matter, even to me, whether it is agreed to or not, and you won't fly at my throat like a bull-dog?—Good. I know a way, then," and here he sunk his voice, "by which you may get four thousand pounds within the week, and five times as much, and even more, when the old governor yonder," and he jerked his thumb towards the ceiling, "'hops the twig.' What do you think of *that* for a prospect? And yet it all lies within reach of your hand. Can't you guess the riddle now?"

What with his caution and his excitement, Mr. William had brought himself so close to his companion that his cunning face was almost touching his, his brandied breath pervading him, his whole being anxious, as it seemed, to become one with his in rascaldom and fraud.

"I feel as if I was being tempted by the devil in person," observed Stanhope frankly; "and yet I've no conception of what you're driving at, for how what you suggest is to be effected. As

for what may occur after your father's death, it would be idle, in talk with such a man as you, to conceal from motives of delicacy"—and yet, notwithstanding his words, the speaker hesitated.

Mr. William nodded and rubbed his hand, as though he was being overwhelmed with compliments.

"I say, of course I am well aware that in the event of a certain contingency, which, however, may, after all, never take place—"

"And which you have no desire *should* take place," struck in the other vehemently; "which you had rather did not happen, if only the desired consequence could be insured without it. Oh, I know all that; I have watched you, I have marked you, my friend. I am not such a fool as I look, not such a fool as you and some others have been in the habit of taking me for." And as Mr. William spoke those words, he really did not look like a fool, but resembled a sharp and exceptionally malignant satyr. "When a chap's sweet upon a gal himself," continued he, with his finger at his nose, to impart additional significance to his philosophy, "then his eyes are sharpest to see through other chaps as have their fancies."

"Really, Mr. Blackburn, these sagacious reflections are entirely thrown away upon me," said Stanhope carelessly, but with his face scarlet to the brow, nevertheless. "What I was about to observe is this; that supposing the contingency—to which no more direct allusion need be made, sir, since it is not only an impertinence to me, but an insult to one whose feelings are much more worthy of consideration—supposing the contingency to take place, then I understand as well as you do that I shall have considerable command of money. But as for these four thousand pounds within the week, I should like to know where in the fiend's name are they to be found?"

"I will find them," said Mr. William triumphantly. "When I told you I had not got them, I told you truth: but Mr. Waller let fall a word to-day which assures me that I could raise them—for an intimate friend in his last extremity, that is."

The speaker wore a look so very much out of keeping with the benevolence of his words, that Stanhope involuntarily ejaculated: "Yes, he is the devil, and I shall presently have to sign his bond with my heart's blood."

"You will have to sign nothing at all, my good sir," returned the other persuasively. "I am only about to ask you to give up something to which you have really no just claim."

"If you refer to any hope I may entertain of securing your niece's hand, Blackburn, I promise—on the terms you mention—to forego at once all pretensions."

"Bah! you may marry Ellen to-morrow for all I care, supposing, that is, we agree beforehand upon this little matter. I simply require of you to place in my hands—which are certainly the properest to hold it—that bit of pa-

per which you took away with you to Curlew Hall the other day."

"What! your father's will?"

"Yes, my father's will."

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

AFTER NIGHT-POACHERS.

As William Blackburn uttered those last words, it seemed that Stanhope had clean forgotten his promise to keep his temper. He leaped from his chair with a great oath, and dashed his open palm against the table. But the next moment he moved slowly to the unshuttered window, and leaning his hot brow against the pane, looked out into the moonlit night in silence.

"Surely," thought he in the bitterness of his soul, "my degradation is now complete. For six months have I been fortune-hunting, despised by all lookers-on, and discouraged by the girl that I have made pretense to love; for six months have I been in hiding from men, such as he who has written to me to-day, and who believes me to be a liar and a thief; and now this villain here has asked my price for betraying a sick man's trust. Six months ago, I would have struck him to the earth for daring to hint as much, but now I have no such dainty sense of my own honor, and yet I am only twenty-five: I wonder what I shall be when I reach this man's age."

"Well, Stanhope, what say you?" inquired Mr. William, whose greedy eyes had followed his every movement, and were fixed upon him still, though he had to twist his own neck half round for that purpose. "Come and sit down again, and let us talk over it quietly."

"I can't sit down," said Stanhope, opening the glass door as he spoke—letting in the cool night-air, and the sweep and swirl of the stream: he felt as if he needed air, space, movement, to save him from suffocation.

"I don't like that," said William peevishly; "you must shut the door—one does not know who may be at some open window listening."

"But the secret's out, isn't it?" asked Stanhope with a harsh laugh. "You have no other piece of roguery to propose, have you?"

"Roguery!—who said it was roguery? It's only natural, I suppose, that a man's only son should wish to be the custodian of the thing I spoke of, instead of a stranger."

"Oh, it's merely a question of sentiment, is it?" rejoined the other carelessly. "I had no idea you set so high a value upon such delicate ware.—Four thousand pounds down, did you not say, and twenty or twenty-five thousand to follow?"

"Say twenty-five," said William, "and one more. Upon the whole, then, you will clear thirty thousand pounds by riding home to-morrow, and bringing back with you—you know what: after that, you have only to hold your tongue."

"It is really princely munificence," said Stanhope in tones that mocked himself at least as much as his companion.

"It is worth my while, or else I shouldn't give it," said the other coolly. "You're not such a fool as to suppose I have not read the thing, and made my calculations accordingly; and indeed I have no doubt you have done the same."

"No, sir; curiously enough, I have omitted that precaution; and I should like to know, before giving you a final answer, how you propose to recoup yourself?"

"You had much better ask no questions," said William significantly. "If you are disturbed at my giving too large a sum for so slight a service, take less; or comfort yourself with the assurance that it is not I who shall have to pay it."

"He is telling me now," thought Stanhope, "that he means to destroy the will, thereby making himself sole heir, and to pay me out of what is in fact his niece's money. He has made up his mind to beggar her, to begin with; and Herbert Stanhope, whom she has refused to listen to as a lover, is, he thinks, the very man to acquiesce in the arrangement. Thirty thousand pounds!—in another minute he will be proposing to make it guineas, if I will only smother the old man up stairs. And yet, scoundrel as he is, he must have at least as bad an opinion of me as I of him. He and that imperative gentleman whose letter I have here in my pocket, have done me a good turn so far: they have made me for the first time see myself as others see me. From this night, I am no longer Squire Stanhope of Curlew Hall—shall no longer wear borrowed plumes. As this is the villain of this melodrama, let me be that less interesting character who is 'poor but honest.' I'll dispose of the Firgrove at once, no matter at what loss, and the rest of the property shall be advertised for sale. I'll take that will, and put it into Moffat's hands to-morrow morning for safe keeping. In the mean time, and since this is the last night I shall ever pass beneath his roof, why should I perplex this gentleman with a show of virtue?"

"My good sir," broke forth William impatiently, "you have not given me your answer? There is no fear but that you will keep a whole skin in the matter; it is only my mother who knows that you have the thing in your possession, and I can answer for her silence. Your hesitation is altogether without reason."

"I dare say it does seem so," said Stanhope gravely. "However, the will shall pass from my keeping to-morrow, that I promise you."

"That's good!" cried William excitedly, holding out his hand, which the other took.—"To-morrow, you shall have my bond for the four thousand, and for the rest; I thought we should come to a mutual understanding, when once I could make up my mind to speak; but the fact is, you were so devilish high and mighty about that unlucky affair at Chester, that (although of course I knew it was all put on) I was almost afraid to trust you with my little plan. However, I knew you were a man of honor—not to

blab if you passed your word to keep any thing dark; and so I risked it."

"I am sure I am much obliged to you for your good opinion," said Stanhope curtly; "but truth is only to be expected in a man in liquor, and I'm sorry to see you don't drink."

"I never drink when I have business in hand," answered the other with a cunning wink—albeit he had already taken half a bottle of brandy—"but when it's satisfactorily concluded, I will soak with the best man alive. Come, fill your glass, and let's make a night of it—we two. I hate the night, and like to kill it."

"The sentiment does you the greatest credit, Mr. Blackburn, as indeed all your sentiments do. If you don't like darkness, let us set fire to the house, and have a good blaze. What is a little arson more or less, when one is determined to have things as we wish them?" and Stanhope burst into a fierce shout of laughter.

"I say, what the deuce is the matter with you?" inquired Mr. William apprehensively. "They will be sure up stairs to think it's me, and that I'm drunk."

"Impossible!" exclaimed Stanhope mockingly; "that is only your modest notion of what other people think of you." And again he laughed, so that the low rafters shook again. He was really getting excited, not with drink, but with the very tumult of his thoughts, which found a natural vent in this bitter railleury. It was impossible to converse soberly with such a man as his companion had showed himself to be, and his scorn and loathing of him seemed to long for utterance in some shape.

"I do wish you would make less noise," said William petulantly: "you will really cause people to suspect something by such unusual behavior. Even as it is, your obstinacy in keeping the door open may have done mischief. I heard something stirring in the garden just now, I thought, but of course that must be fancy."

"Why, I heard something too. Look there!" Mr. William dragged his chair from where it was, and placed it behind Stanhope's. "What!—where?" cried he, looking with terror over the other's shoulder. "I wish you'd lock that window and close the shutters, else what's the use of the candles?"

"Why, my good friend, why? I am sure, with your admirable sentiments, you can not but be an admirer of the picturesque. I was only calling your attention to that sudden splendor of the moonbeams; a moment ago it was all gloom, and now it is as light as day, look you. So beautiful, and yet so cold and ghastly, like the face of some dead woman."

"Be quiet, can't you; I hate such talk," cried Mr. William nervously.

"But it's only moonshine, my good sir," said the other, grimly pleased to find an unexpected weapon of annoyance so ready to his hand. "You don't mean to tell me that an intellect like yours is capable of superstition? That this gutter in the candle, for instance, which some would call a winding-sheet—"

"It's that internal window being open that does that," said William hastily.

"Of course it is; there speaks the practical philosopher. But I know men—that is, who call themselves such—who would consider it an omen—a sign that something ugly was about to happen—that death itself was hovering about us even now. Do you know, Blackburn, I'm almost ashamed to say it, but I feel a little 'all-overish' myself to-night. I think I shall go out into the air and have a row in the skiff, to shake it off."

"What! and leave me? You wouldn't be such a beast as that, surely, when you have promised to sit up with me all night?"

"Very well, why not sit in the boat? I shall most certainly have a row;" and Stanhope rose from his chair.

"No, no," implored the other; "I can't be left alone to-night; and the skiff won't hold us—that is, it is never safe when any body rocks it, and I know you'll rock it, because you're drunk. If we must go, let's take the 'punt.'"

"Very well, then, the punt let it be; and look you, although I am sober as a judge, I am ripe for any thing to-night, except going to sleep; so let's go after those poachers. They must be somewhere between here and the mill, for certain."

Stanhope, although, as he protested, quite sober, was in that state of mental excitement to which inaction is hateful, and the ordinary surroundings of life seem burdensome and oppressive. "The blind wild beast of Force that lies within the sinews of a man" was roused in him, and he would have welcomed fight and peril. Mr. William's case—afraid to start on such a dangerous errand, and still more averse to be left alone, a prey to nameless terrors—was pitiable indeed; but eventually he got cap and coat, and seated himself, with as much of courage as his brandy-flask would hold, in the stern of the punt, while the other used the pole.

It was, as Stanhope had said, as light as day; every jut and coign of the cottage, every stone of the bridge, stood out in strong relief as they slid up stream. The wind had chopped to the east, and was blowing sharply, so that the trees that fringed the steep right bank of the river shivered and swayed; but down in the sheltered channel it was scarcely felt, though the stream bore here and there a silver curl that marked a wavelet, and against the broad flat prow of the punt the water chafed and whitened angrily. It was hard work pushing against wind and stream, and Stanhope enjoyed it; and when he ceased from his exertion, it was never to rest, but to gaze eagerly about in search of those who had preceded them.

"I see nothing of those rascals," exclaimed he presently; "I am afraid they have done their work, and put their boat up at the mill; in that case they will escape us, confound them, for I suppose one must catch them in the very act, eh?—that's the law, isn't it?"

"Of course it is," replied the would-be coun-

ty magistrate; "though I must say I should have rather enjoyed a tussle myself."

"Hush! be quiet!—we shall have them yet; I hear something." And Stanhope noiselessly pushed the boat beneath a bluff of the right bank, where it could lie in shadow; above them the steep rose sheer, with one strong sapling growing from it almost at right angles, so that the branches dipped to within a few feet of them.

"What a strange noise that is, Blackburn. If it was warmer weather, I should have said that it was distant thunder."

His companion, who did not care what it was, so long as it was not poachers engaged in breaking the law, and thereby inviting deeds of violence, expressed his opinion that whether warm enough or not, it was thunder, and "deuced near thunder too. A storm is brewing," said he, "and it's my idea we had better get home at once, with dry skins."

"A storm, with a sky like that! Pooh!—nonsense! Hark! there's a horse coming down the gorge, and at full gallop too; it must have got loose, and been frightened at that noise; and I don't wonder. How it swells and roars! God of heaven! can the reservoir have burst?"

"The what?" cried William, starting from his seat with such a piercing yell that, even in that moment of anxiety, Stanhope stared at him speechless with sheer amazement. His face, though in shadow, showed as white as though the moonlight were full on it, and his eyes seemed to be starting from their sockets. But at that same instant another spectacle presented itself—a horse and rider at full speed came round an angle of the opposite bank, and thundered down the road. It was John Denton, riding as if for life.

"What has happened?" cried Stanhope: "for God's sake, tell us!"

"The embankment's gone, and the water is coming down," roared the other. "Up the bank, or you are dead men!" And he did not even turn his head, but was out of sight before the echo of his words had died away.

Then, for the first time, the thunder of the torrent broke unmistakably on their ears. Stanhope sprung at the drooping sapling, seized a branch, and swung himself a few feet up the bank, not nearly far enough, as he well knew, for safety; but then he stopped, for William did not stir. "Up, up, Blackburn; there is not an instant to lose. Don't you hear the flood coming down?"

Yes, he both heard and saw; for, following the direction of his eyes, the other beheld, just in the act of rounding the next reach of the little river, a huge wall of water, forty feet high as it looked, and crowned with foam, which came on *en masse* with an incredible swiftness, and the roar of a hundred seas. Stanhope turned, and digging feet and fingers into the hard cliff, struggled desperately upward to the summit. Though even then scarce feeling secure, he could not resist the terrible attraction of the spectacle, but, lying at full length upon the cliff-top, peered

down upon the ruin beneath. His late companion was standing in the same spot, not, as he had expected to see him, paralyzed with terror, but gesticulating vehemently, and apparently (though nothing could now be heard but the fury of the flood) ejaculating something at the top of his voice. He was pointing to the creaming top of the hurrying wall, where he seemed to see some object visible only to himself. Then, as the mighty mass swept by him, and him along with it, he suddenly threw up his hands, and once more, ere he was whelmed in the wave, that piercing shriek rang out above its thunderous roar. The next instant a river was rushing by, nearly on a level with the spot where Stanhope lay, and at the rate of some twenty miles an hour, in place of the babbling little Carlow.

"Thank God, she is safe at Mosedale!" ejaculated Stanhope; "but alas! for poor Ellen."

CHAPTER XXXIX.

THE RIDE FOR LIFE.

It was not without reason that William had warned Stanhope that his fierce mirth would rouse the cottage, for it woke the sick man above stairs, whose eyes asked of Ellen, his night-watcher, what the noise might mean, then once more wearily closed. Ellen herself, always alert when it was her turn for duty, was rendered more wakeful by it; she knew that it was not her uncle's laugh, and yet how unlike it was to Stanhope's! She had heard the two in serious talk, and then the opening door and their embarkation. Why they should have chosen such an hour for a river-trip was a mystery which excited her. They went up stream—was it possible to examine for themselves the state of the embankment at its head, about which dear John seemed so solicitous? It was much more likely to be a mere drunken frolic of her uncle's; but Ellen preferred the less obvious solution, because it had reference to her lover. She had looked to see him recross the bridge that day, but he had not done so, having probably returned to Mosedale by way of Redmoor. How beautiful the stream and garden looked! Now grandfather had dropped asleep again, and those men were gone, and all the house was still, why should she not go out into the moonlight? She was dressed, of course, and had only to put on her bonnet and shawl—she would be back in a few minutes; her head ached, and the cool air would do her good.

She leaned over the old man, to listen to his breathing, and to smooth his pillow ere she went. The moonbeams seemed to make his white beard whiter, and his pale face still more pallid. Poor grandfather! how long was this to last? Her thoughts were entirely of him and for him. It never crossed her mind, How long is he to linger on, a barrier between John and me?

Then she stepped down stairs, without a sound, through the little dining-room—still reeking of spirits and tobacco, notwithstanding its open window—and so out. The cottage stood between her and the quarter from whence the wind was blowing, so that she was quite in shelter; but she noticed a ghostly shiver in the willow, and that the rushes on the island below were all blowing one way. Presently, upon her ear too fell the weird sound which had struck on Stanhope's only a minute or so before; but it did not move her as it did him. Another and more attractive sound mixed with it, the galloping of horse's feet. It must, thought she, be John coming back at last. Of the two ways home, he would surely take the one that led by her door. And yet, if it was he, what could have kept him up yonder all the livelong day?—What a hurry he was in, now that he did come. He must be riding at full gallop—as fast, so it seemed, as the horse could lay legs to ground. How foolish of him to run the risk of a fall by using such headlong speed in that uncertain-moonlight! She was not going to speak to him, of course, for that was forbidden, but she would just go to the road-side and show herself, so that he might not gallop past in his mad haste and miss her altogether. He would, of course, imagine that at such an hour—for it was just midnight—she would be fast asleep, and perhaps not even cast his eyes towards the house—although, in truth, he could scarcely have avoided that.

A few steps brought her to the little gate that opened from the garden (there was no room for carriage-sweep) immediately upon the road. There she stood and listened. Besides the horse, there now seemed to be some heavy wagon rumbling along the way, and yet it was a strange time, surely, for carts to be coming from the mill. But all other thoughts or fancies vanish as a horseman comes round yonder bend, whom she knows well; the wind—and it is no wonder, considering the pace at which he cleaves the air—has taken his hat; yet he has not stopped for that, but rides on at the same mad speed bareheaded. There is peril behind him for certain; and hark! how that rumbling of the wagon increases, just as though, urged by four fleet horses, it was flying after him, and he knew there was no room on the narrow way for him and it. What with the bright sheen of the moonbeams and the silence of the midnight, unbroken save by that weird sound, the whole scene seems to Ellen unreal and eerie. The translation of some German ballad which Lucy has been reading to her, of late, respecting a spectre horseman who comes to claim his false bride, and carries her off from her kith and kin to his home the grave, flashes upon her brain as Denton gallops up. She notices how pale he looks, instead of ruddy, as might have been expected after such a ride, and how his horse is bathed in foam. He draws his rein and holds his arms out, as if to embrace her, and with a glad cry she rushes into them. "Mount, mount!"

cries he; "up, up! for your life." And by sheer force—for, in the extremity of her surprise, she neither aids him nor resists—he has swung her up before him, and again the horse is at full speed.

"John, John, are you mad?" exclaims she, beginning to struggle.

"The flood, the flood!" was his reply. "The reservoir has burst! Look yonder!"

"But grandfather, poor grandfather!" She would have struggled down, if he had not held her with a grasp of iron, even then—even then, as they flew across the bridge to gain the hill beyond, and when all the horror of the scene burst on them both for the first time. The Thing from which Denton had fled with such fiery speed—the thing with which he had raced so far—the goal herself (for whichever reached her first must needs indeed possess her), was upon them at last. The watery wall, just breast high with the bridge, dashed on to it at the same moment as they, and drenched them through and through; it was lower than it had been when it rushed past Stanhope, because the bed of the river was less narrow, otherwise both horse and riders would have been swept over the low parapet at the first shock; but as it was they galloped through the flood. Once on the hillside, they were safe; and Denton stopped his panting steed and gazed behind him with unspeakable awe. The spectacle was indeed sublime as well as terrible. The bridge over which they had just passed was gone: a seething, weltering mass of waters occupied its place, with only the angry waves—made fierce by the vain resistance of battlement, and plank, and pier—to mark the place where it had been. The cottage—because on the side of the main channel—still stood, but through every door and window on the ground floor poured the mad river; and the whole house was visibly trembling to its fall. What a scene must the mirrors in that upper chamber have presented to poor helpless Anthony, awakened by that inexplicable thunder!

"Save him, save poor grandfather!" gasped Ellen, thinking of this, and scarce knowing what she said.

"I have saved *you*, dearest, God be thanked!" said Denton gravely. "To do more is not in human power."

Even while he spoke, the pretty cottage, which but a few minutes ago had looked like a fairy bower nestled in that quiet stream-washed nook, collapsed like a house of cards, "caved in" on all sides, and sank; and there was nothing to be seen but the wild waste of waters!

There was no sign of human entreaty or despair—the whole household, as well as its helpless master, had apparently been caught in their beds, and so, only half-conscious, perhaps, of their terrible doom, were drowned.

Ellen closed her eyes, while her white lips moved in prayer; and when she looked forth again, the river was hidden from sight—Denton was pushing on for Mosedale.

"Where are you taking me? Let me stay

here!" exclaimed she wildly—"let me stay by poor grandfather!"

"His body will be at Mosedale before us," answered Denton sadly. "Your home is no longer here, since it does not exist. I am taking you to the Cedars;" which was the name of Mr. Waller's residence.

"Yes, take me to grandmother; she is there, and safe, thank Heaven! But surely this is not the way?"

"It is not the shortest way, dearest, because that is impassable: the road by the river must be ten feet under water by this."

"Alas for the poor cottagers on the marsh," sighed Ellen.

"They will have neither fever nor ague more," was the solemn reply.

"And the family at Island Grove," continued Ellen, as her mind rapidly travelled over the space through which the flood, at scarcely a less speed, was hurrying.

"Death is busy to-night both with rich and poor; and their blood is on the heads of them who would not stay him whilst they could," returned Denton sternly.

"Oh, John, you were right, then, after all. Lucy told me that her father—"

"Hush, dearest. Do not mention to me that man's name to-night, for I can not bear it."

Presently they reached a suburb of the town, whither the flood itself had already brought its own evil tidings. Notwithstanding the lateness of the hour, there were lights in all the houses, most of the inhabitants of which, however, had gone down to the river-side to behold the scene of devastation. Others, half dressed, were running thither from all directions; and so excited were they, that they did not even notice the double burden borne by Denton's horse. At the gate of the Cedars, over which the once pleasant garden could be seen, a tangled mass of slime and ruin, Ellen dismounted; but Denton rode on, refusing to set foot within that house.

CHAPTER XL.

AFTER THE FLOOD.

THERE was no rest for any in Mosedale for the remainder of that night. The passion of the raging flood had indeed much abated by the time it reached the town; and the mischief it wrought was comparatively small, by reason of the greater width of the stream; yet its sudden rush through the unsuspecting streets had not been without its human victims, and had smitten the place with universal terror. Almost the whole population were out upon the river-bank within half an hour of the catastrophe; and while they regretted their own losses, there went forth an awful whisper of how ill it must have fared with them who lived "up Curlew." Two women and four children had been drowned in their beds, within a stone's throw of the very market-place, and it was almost unintelligible

to those who looked upon the row of cottages where this had occurred, and then at the narrow thread of river which wound beside it, how such a mischance could be. The stream had shrunk to its usual limits; and a broad muddy strip on either hand was all that remained of its late outbreak, except the ruin it had caused. Houses were gutted as completely as though that other element, which we commonly term "destroying," had been at work. Strong walls were swept away, and scarce one stone upon another left to mark their place; gardens were become swampy wildernesses; the town bridge had stood, but showed great gaps, where stone and iron had alike yielded to the watery shock. It would take months to repair and years to obliterate the traces of that night's ruin. And if all this had happened at Mosedale, miles away from the spot where the waters had first burst their prison-house, what must have taken place "at the marsh" and the mill, the great water-wheel of which, it was rumored the next day, was found at Bromfield, ten miles below Mosedale—one human body, it may be here said, was stranded, thirty miles from the spot where the flood first clutched it for a prey.

It was the season, although early in it, when Mosedale folk were wont on holidays to flock "up Curlew," by land or water, and feast and make merry among its woody steeps and winding gorges; but never did so great a company take that road before as on the day which followed the bursting of Redmoor Reservoir, albeit bent on a very different errand. There is no need here to describe what they saw, save so far as it has connection with this story—the bodies that lay stark and stiff by scores upon the muddy shore or showed a limb above the still turbid stream; the shattered relics of what had been human homes; the objects of domestic care and pride, which, soiled and shattered, strewed the torn-up road and barren swamp—so lately fertile fields—that fringed it: you may buy photographs—such pictures as the bold-faced sun alone can paint—of that wreck and ruin to this day.

Stanhope and Denton were in a skiff together, having a common object of which they were in search. The former, whose feelings had been hitherto, if not hostile, at least unfavorable towards the latter, was in that respect, as in others, wholly changed; unfeigned admiration for this young man, who had risked his life, and, indeed, only preserved it by a hair-breadth, to save another's, had taken possession of him. True, he would himself, in like circumstances, have hazarded as much, but the opportunity in his case could not possibly have occurred. He had no knowledge of any sort that would have served him to scent out any danger which was not patent to all the world. How much more useful, much more valuable, had Denton proved himself, than he could ever have been or be! Not only Ellen, but the tenant of his own mill, together with his wife and child, had escaped death through the unselfish foresight of the young en-

gineer. After visiting the mill on the previous morning, Denton had gone up to Redmoor, and found the crack in the embankment which had already excited his apprehensions, manifestly increasing. He had remained at the reservoir all day, examining it yet again with the utmost minuteness; and, having still further convinced himself of the menaced peril, had made up his mind to lay the case before the municipal authorities of Mosedale the next day, since the Board of Directors would not listen to him. At the same time, although he still remained on the moor with only a couple of workmen for his companions, he had not conceived the danger to be so alarmingly imminent as it really was, until late at night. Then, the wind still rising, and bringing the mass of water to bear directly upon the bank, certain indications showed themselves which, to his practised eye, convinced him that the catastrophe was at hand; and he had sped down the gorge, as we have seen, but with feelings not to be described, listening, as he urged his horse to utmost speed, for the sound behind him that should give notice that the water-fiend was loose and roaring for its prey. He lost a minute or two waking the sleepy miller, whom he had not the heart, notwithstanding his own safety and that of one far dearer than himself was imperilled by the delay, to leave to drown. Scarcely had the warning left his lips, when the thunder of the torrent gave its terrible corroboration to his words. And yet he had not now a word to say of his own efforts, except what was incidentally extracted from him by Stanhope's eager questions.

The young engineer showed himself much more solicitous for his reputation for professional sagacity than to be considered as a hero. With reference to Mr. Waller, he said: "I could not get that man to believe me, sir, simply because his giving credit to my words would have cost him a few pounds. Did he suppose I did not know my own business? No, sir. It was mere selfishness and saving, and those are the fruits of it;" and he pointed to where some men were even then taking into a larger boat close beside them a sad freight—the bodies of a mother and the babe whom she embraced even in her last sleep.

"Forgive me," said Stanhope humbly, "if I venture to differ from you, Mr. Denton, who have hitherto shown yourself so wise and in the right throughout this sad affair. But I know Waller well. He may have—nay, he has doubtless been both obstinate and foolish, but I am sure that a few pounds were not the cause of his opposition, even if they had any thing to do with it at all. He has lost a much larger sum than such as you hint at by the destruction of his own property, as we have just seen. You are a very young man, and he is not one to credit young men with the wisdom you have shown; he judges them by myself and those like me—fools enough, Heaven knows. Even Mr. Fly-wheel seems to have scouted the idea of the reservoir being in danger from the first."

"Yes, but he had no personal knowledge of

the thing, which makes all the difference. Now, I had, and I pleaded with Mr. Waller as I never pleaded before with man or woman. He is not one to underrate genuine earnestness, though he has so little of it himself. No, no, sir; his obstinacy was willful; reparation he can not make, but he will have to answer for this mischief to God and man."

"To God he must needs answer," said Stanhope gravely. "But I pray you, Mr. Denton, to take counsel of your own heart before you publicly brand him, as I fear your purpose is, with a mark compared with which that of Cain was as nothing, before you make him an object of execration to the widow and the fatherless throughout this valley for last night's work. It is not my way to talk like this. I dare say you have always thought me an unprincipled and vicious fellow, as indeed I have been—nay, for all that I have shown, I am. You see in me even now, doubtless, a frivolous and idle nature, brought for once face to face with the realities of life and death, and for the moment impressed by them; but before this ruin was wrought—before I heard your warning cry upon the river last night, Mr. Denton, which saved a worthless life, I had, believe me, formed— But there, that is no matter; let it suffice to say that I hope you will some day have cause to think better of me, since your good opinion is one I fain would earn. It is difficult, I know—for my own conduct has made it so—to persuade you to credit me with an honest purpose, but indeed I have no other in thus appealing to you. I saw the man whom you would punish so harshly, but two hours ago; he is borne down to the very earth with sorrow and contrition. He accuses himself, as you would accuse him (and, as it seems to me, with the like injustice), of all that has occurred. The tremendous nature of the evil that has been reaped does not make him more guilty of having sown it. No doubt, he ought to have listened to you—the event has proved it—but he did not foresee the event. I give you my honor (not a very material guaranty, you may say perhaps, but still the best I have to offer), that he did not credit your scientific forebodings. Why should you doubt it, who found myself unquestionably a disbeliever in them? You were earnest, passionate, eloquent enough with me also, at the cottage yesterday morning, and yet you see, like the wicked of old, I did not credit you till, with overwhelming evidence indeed, the Flood came. Forgive me, Mr. Denton, but are you quite certain that there is nothing of wounded *amour propre* that mingles with and embitters your just wrath?"

"There may be something in what you say," answered Denton frankly. "Heaven forbid that I should feel more angry with this man because he has underrated my intelligence and despised it; personally, at all events—though, I trust, in a matter of the public service, in my duty as a citizen, such a consideration would not weigh a feather's weight—I say, personally, it

would be most disagreeable for me to act as Mr. Waller's accuser, since even now under his roof—"

The young man hesitated—then stopped.

"Mr. Denton," said Stanhope, resting on his oar, and speaking with deep feeling, "this is no time for false delicacy, although I honor you for your unwillingness to speak upon a subject which might give me pain. It is a scruple which I have not deserved. I have no claim to be coupled in your thoughts with the young lady of whom you were about to speak. Her heart has always been yours; although I own with shame, that after I knew that it was so, I strove to win her hand."

"Let us say no more about that, Mr. Stanhope, since you have at last taken the just view of the matter," said the other quietly.

"Since I have lost my own self-respect, you would say, Mr. Denton, and yet that was a small part of the penalty. I lost also—for though I can not justify myself, I wish to show you that I have suffered—the respect of one in whose estimation I now feel it is misery indeed to have thus fallen."

"I think I can help you there," said Denton good-humoredly. "It is not eight-and-forty hours ago that I had proof that, notwithstanding what you say, you are not altogether out of the pale of somebody's good graces. A woman does not defend a man in his absence with such vigor as somebody then defended you without a very sufficient cause. I ought to know, because it was I who attacked you—for, indeed, I have not spared you, Mr. Stanhope, whenever you have formed the subject of my discourse."

"I am sure that I deserved all that you could say," returned the other. "I only wish I could see how I deserved the defense of which you speak."

"I don't say you did deserve it," returned Denton slyly; "indeed I honestly confess that I don't think you did. But that should give you the better ground for hope. For when Truth fails to offer a justification, who is it, among the virtues at least, that can suggest one, save Love itself?"

"She told me with her own lips," said Stanhope in a low voice, and like one who communes with himself—"it was on the terrace at Redcombe, and not a week ago—that I was mean and base, a hypocrite and a coward—that, so far from having any longer a claim to be considered a gentleman, I had not even common honesty; and when I strove to palliate my offense, she hinted that I was little better than a liar."

"Which, under the circumstances," observed Denton, in his soberest tone, "was equivalent to a declaration of love. She told me—who had not asked for the information, and, to say truth, was far from desirous to hear it—that she had known you from your boyhood, and that a nobler nature, until idleness and its consequences had warped it, did not exist in any man. It is a subject with which I am incompetent to deal, and far less with the eloquence

which the young lady used—but if it is any pleasure to you to hear it, Mr. Stanhope, I may tell you that I also am now of Miss Waller's opinion." And the engineer, who was pulling stroke, stretched his hand behind him, which Stanhope took and wrung in silence. From that moment dated a friendship between these two young men, which distance has never weakened and time has cemented.

The skiff had now reached the place where the Fishery had stood, and where the further progress of those on land had been stayed by the absence of Curlew Bridge, of which only a few jutting stones on either side were left. It was impossible to recognize the scene by any other means. The boats, where formerly Squire Richard's punt and skiff had commonly formed the whole flotilla, were clustered so thickly that you could scarcely see the river; while masses of people lined the once solitary bank, who, as though they had not already supped full enough of horrors, watched the operations of the boatmen on the other side with feverish excitement. It was here that the stream began to narrow, and indeed from Curlew Mill down to this point it ran through what was but a ravine—yesterday a scene of exquisite beauty, to-day one of ravage and desolation. For upwards of twenty feet in height, where a broad black mark was to be seen, such as the tide leaves at high water, the banks were denuded of every scrap of vegetation; while the road on the left hand, along which Denton had spurred a few hours ago, no longer existed, but was a mere shelving mass of mud and rubbish. But the river-bed itself, and what had once been the rose-garden, afforded the strangest spectacle. In the former stood vast rocks, torn from the gorge just below Redmoor, and set up here, as if in perpetual token—and indeed they long remained so—of the water's wrath; while in the latter the action of the flood, which some obstruction had maddened into a whirlpool, had dug vast holes many feet in depth, and more or less circular; just as in other streams with stony beds there are found similar excavations, which, however, it takes hundreds of years to form. It was in these holes the boatmen were looking, and when they chanced to find what they sought, a hoarse murmur from the spectators evinced that interest which horror alone can evoke, and even of horrors only one—the visible presence of Death. The flood, in fact, after slaying its victims, had, as though ashamed of its murderous work, in this place in a manner buried them. In other parts, where its course had been more free, it had hurried rocks and trees indiscriminately with its human prey, so that the latter were in many cases so crushed and mutilated that it was almost impossible to recognize them as men at all, far less to identify their remains; but none of the inhabitants of the cottage had been thus swept away; their bodies were all found within a few feet of the spot where death had seized them; and most of them without signs of violence. That of Anthony Blackburn, in particular, was quite unin-

jured both in limb and feature, and over that still and solemn face more than one genuine mourner dropped a tear that night in a chamber at the Cedars, where he lay, as it almost seemed,—"so grand he looked when he was dead,"—in state; his strange, eventful life, with all its wear and fret, thus strangely ended.

CHAPTER XLI.

WHICH PLACES OUR FRIENDS.

HERBERT STANHOPE had not exaggerated the matter when he said that Mr. Waller blamed himself exceedingly for his late obstinacy in resisting Denton's appeals, and was deeply touched by the fatal consequences arising from it. But in a day or two, and by the time the public inquiry was commenced, the quick-witted man had not only recovered his mental balance, but had persuaded himself that if he had not absolutely acted for the best, he had only committed an error in judgment, after all. By the time the inquest was concluded, Lucy, who remembered with a sharp but secret pang her father's statement with respect to the depreciation of the reservoir shares, was perhaps the only one not brought over to his own conviction, so earnest and plausible were his explanations. Had he not Mr. Flywheel's letter, upon which, laying his hand upon it in the solemnest manner, he showed that that eminent engineer, whose reputation was European, had had no misgiving of the embankment's stability, and had ridiculed those entertained, only a few months before, upon apparently precisely similar grounds, by Mr. Denton. It was true that the latter gentleman had proved himself to be in the right, and thereby won a place for himself in his profession, elevated indeed for one so young; but was he, Mr. Waller, to be blamed for taking his views from the master, and not the pupil? As to interested motives, of which, thank Heaven, he had, however, not heard a whisper, it was evident that he was the very last man to be accused in that respect. The expenses of such an official inspection as Mr. Denton had demanded would have been trifling, though it was true, as one of the chief shareholders, he (Mr. Waller) would have had to bear a considerable portion of it; but even as a matter of insurance to his property at Mosedale, it would have been worth his while to disburse a few pounds, if he had really thought there was occasion for it; whereas, what had actually happened to him, in consequence of his unfortunate though not willful neglect to do so, was total and irremediable ruin. Yes, he stood before that court a ruined man; since, even if the result of that inquiry should not be to compel the Reservoir Company to repay the enormous pecuniary losses which had been incurred by the catastrophe, let only the price of the shares at present be compared with what it had been a few days ago—but he did not care to enter into that subject. What was liability or pecuniary loss, that it was

to be mentioned at such a time as that, when Rachel was weeping for her children, and would not be comforted, because they were not! And what was ruin or poverty to *him*, compared with the sting of that remorse which would never cease to torture him for having, however innocently—however much in accordance with the highest scientific authority—neglected precautions by which this great calamity, which had not spared even those who were nearest and dearest to him and his, might have been averted!

So ingenuous and eloquent, indeed, was the ex-M.P.'s defense, that, next to the immediate sufferers by the catastrophe, there was no one who attracted so much public pity as the chairman of that Board which at first was looked upon as having been the culpable cause of all that had happened. Even John Denton, to whose sagacity Mr. Waller paid so many compliments at the expense of his own, felt half convinced, and his evidence certainly bore less hardly upon the latter than might reasonably have been expected. Indeed, so far as his pecuniary affairs were concerned (if one left out of the question the expectations he had cherished respecting a rich son-in-law), Mr. Waller was, upon the whole, exceedingly benefited by the bursting of the embankment, since, under shelter of it, he was able to become bankrupt himself—which must have happened at all events sooner or later—in a most honorable and gratifying manner, as he always spoke of it (and honestly believed it to be), though he only paid threepence in the pound.

There was no such excuse for Herbert Stanhope, who was greatly blamed in the county for disposing first of the great Firgrove, and immediately afterwards of the whole Curlew Hall estate, which was purchased by a commercial person of no family, and, it was greatly feared, with an eye to dispose of it on building-leases. He paid, however, a much larger price for it than had been expected; so that, after the mortgages were discharged, there was sufficient to pay all Stanhope's turf debts, and yet leave him a thousand or two to begin the world afresh with. Advisers were not wanting as to the most judicious investment of this little property. Sporting Dawlish, who had been rather "hit" on the last Derby, pressed his friend very much to lay it out on a "perfect certainty" for the ensuing Leger—no gammon about an animal that can't be beaten, like your *Vignette*, but a really foregone conclusion—a secret so valuable and momentous that it could not be trusted to ink and paper. Never since lords became blacklegs had there been such an opportunity, upon his honor. But Herbert, with many thanks for that and for a past kindness, which, he said, and truly, he should never forget, declined this tempting offer. He had "a perfect certainty," he wrote, as far as a promise could go, of his own, which was quite sufficient for him; in point of fact, he was engaged to be married to Miss Lucy Waller.

"Then Herby is distanced, and that fellow Denton has taken up the running with the other filly," exclaimed Dawlish when he reached

that part of the letter; and we, who have had such opportunities of observing for ourselves, may easily imagine that the sagacious young gentleman was right.

A second astute counsellor as to the disposal of the relics of Stanhope's property offered himself in the person of Mr. Waller, who had consented, in the handsomest and most agreeable manner (though not till he had found opposition useless), to Stanhope's marriage with his daughter. Those two or three thousand pounds of his, he assured him, could be quadrupled in a year or two, by investing it in the submarine tunnel about to be constructed between Weymouth and St. Heliers, in which adventure he could, by favor, still procure for him a few shares. But Stanhope declined even this glittering bait.

John Denton, on whose judgment he had had such good cause to rely, and who never expressed himself upon any subject of which he had not obtained considerable mastery, had communicated to him some facts received from a sure hand concerning a certain property on the Murray, near Sandhurst in Victoria, and he made up his mind to emigrate thither, and, if possible, to purchase it. He knew something of stock-farming; he was strong and active, and impatient for work for its own sake, even if he had not had the strongest incentive to it in Lucy, who herself in no wise shrank from the prospect of a new life, which, if somewhat hard and rough, should be at least neither hollow nor dishonest. She longed to leave Mosedale, with all its bitter associations, and where she could not persuade herself that her father was regarded by his neighbors as he believed himself to be; and the greater distance that was placed between them and it, even though it were half the world, the better. But, unfortunately, the relics of Stanhope's fortune only just sufficed for the purchase of the stock and land in question and for passage-money, leaving nothing for outfit, and the necessary expenses of setting up an establishment in the bush.

"You should have at least an additional five hundred pounds," said Denton thoughtfully.

"That, at all events, makes my decision easy," answered Stanhope, with the ghost of his old careless laugh, "for it's plain I can't take the farm."

"If you are not too proud to borrow the money from me," said Denton simply, "I shall have a real pleasure in lending it to you."

Stanhope colored to his very temples. "No, I could not think of that," said he decisively.

At this, Denton turned as red as he. "I am sorry," said he stiffly. "I was in hopes that our relations with one another would have admitted of that at least, even if I had offered it as a favor, and not as I honestly meant it—as an eligible investment."

"There is no man's money which I would borrow—nay, if you come to that, accept as a gift—so readily, and with so little sense of humiliation, as yours, sir," said Stanhope warmly.

"Do not let us misunderstand each other again, my friend."

"Oh, I see," exclaimed Denton; "you do not give me credit for having so large a private purse. You fancy I should be obliged to apply elsewhere."

"Yes, to some one whom I respect and esteem above measure, but to whom I could not be pecuniarily indebted."

"Well, she would not like to hear that, I know," said Denton softly. "But perhaps you are right. It is a delicacy, at all events, which does you honor. But, as I was about to say, this money is my own, worked pretty hard for, I flatter myself, and you will much oblige me by taking it. It is as good an investment as can be found, in my opinion, anywhere; so take it, and no thanks."

"And this is the man whom I have been idiot enough to call 'no gentleman,'" thought Stanhope, as he shook hands over that bargain.

We may say here that Stanhope and his bride went out to Sandhurst accordingly, and prospered fairly for some years. We trust even the fair sex will forgive Miss Lucy for not immolating herself, after the fashion of suttee, on the funeral pyre of a husband *in posse*. She frankly informed Herbert that she could never love him exactly as she had loved young Richard; but he quietly acquiesced in that arrangement, acknowledging bluntly, Tartuffe that he was, that he had not merited such adoration. He had no doubt she had sufficient capabilities for affection left for the deserts of a vagabond like him; which indeed proved to be the case. She had always liked him; and when, after her lover's death had softened her, and made her sensitive to all such matters, she saw her once playmate and neighbor about to commit a baseness in endeavoring to win a hand that he knew had been promised to another, she took him soundly to task, received the confession of his enormous liabilities, and began to pity him immensely. *Facilis descensus amoris.*

They married, as we have said; and when they sailed across the world, Mr. Waller accompanied them. He was not a man to bury his talents in the wilderness—good wine needs no *Bush*, he was wont, rather egotistically, to observe—but established himself in excellent quarters at Melbourne, where he became a great social success; entered the legislature, and is not without good grounds for believing that, on the next change of ministry, he may be intrusted with the management of the colonial finances. "'Advance Australia,' will then," he epigrammatically observes, "be indeed its motto;" for he has several speculations on hand, which only need a little help from the government to turn out Eldorados, and they shall have it.

Of course we are much anticipating matters; but after some years of that fair prosperity to which we have referred as having been Stanhope's lot, the information which Denton had received from a scientific friend respecting the

probable value of the Standhurst property at length bore fruit. The very last gold discovery, known as "the Spring Creek Rush," took place upon Stanhope's own land, and he sold that portion for what his father-in-law, with some exaggeration, considering that it was hundreds of acres of the usual thickness, describes as its "weight in gold." At all events, Mr. and Mrs. Stanhope were among the arrivals from Melbourne in one of the Australian steamers this very year; and it is "understood" by the chroniclers of such local pieces of information, "that, thanks to a lucky but well-deserved stroke of Fortune's pick," the estate of Curlew Hall is soon about to pass back into the hands of the same family that have held it for many centuries. In the mean time, the "wealthy and respected pair" are staying at Blackburn Manor, the seat of John Denton, Esq., M.P. It is also announced by the same authority, that the whole of the debts of "our late talented fellow-townsmen, Mr. Waller," have been discharged, notwithstanding there being no legal necessity for such an act, in full.

John Denton, although a wealthy man, by no means owes his prosperity to the fact that he has married an heiress. He is a magnate of the world of cogs and wheels, a prince in his own right of the powers of steam and iron; idleness, albeit of course he has no need (in the vulgar sense) to toil, is impossible with him. But nobody grudges him either money or influence, since he uses both for good. Every man who shows signs of promise, no matter what his calling, yet lacks means, finds a friend, not a patron, in John Denton. His landed neighbors, who looked on him at first with considerable suspicion, and repeated to themselves their favorite shibboleth that "it takes three generations to make a gentleman"—as if thirteen did not as often as not produce a scoundrel—have made up their minds that, notwithstanding those infernal radical notions of his, there is nothing very dangerous about him, after all. But in their secret hearts they are afraid of him. Mrs. Denton herself, it is acknowledged on all hands, is one of the sweetest of gentlewomen; and notwithstanding that early experience of hers—"she was quite poor, my dear, at one time; indeed, abjectly poor; worked at pillow-lace for a livelihood; in fact, it's too shocking to talk about"—with manners not inferior to those of the lord-lieutenant's wife. "But then she comes of a good old stock, and her children at least, of whom she has several, may be held to be members of a county family."

CHAPTER XLII.

AND LAST.

ONE of the most favorite of the evil phrases of the critic runs as follows; "This story has been hurried to a conclusion;" and we are quite aware, under ordinary circumstances, that such a remark would not be wholly inapplicable to our

present narrative. But then we submit that the being swept away *en masse* by a burst reservoir does really hasten the disposal of one's *dramatis personæ* most uncommonly. Suppose, for instance, the critics themselves had been feasting that sad night on the river Curlew, as they often do at Greenwich—which perhaps accounts, in one or two of them, for just the least tinge of biliousness in their reviews—suppose, I repeat, they had been assembled at “the cottage,” discussing some whitebait, let us say, which had been discovered in the mill-stream above, what would have saved even them—let alone a respectable, but humdrum county family like the Blackburns—from being “hurried to a conclusion?” The author, of course, would have risked his life in the attempt to preserve his friends and patrons; he, like Denton, would have thundered down the valley upon any quadruped—or bicycle—which his limited means might have enabled him to have hired. But unless the whole of the excellent company had happened to come out, like Ellen, into the garden to take the air (as is sometimes necessary after whitebait), what could have been done for them? It would have been no use for the poor fellow to—how shall I write it—holloa. When did critic ever pay the least attention to an author's cries? The whole “biling” of them, if one may use so vulgar a term in speaking of so sacred a subject, would have instantly been swept to their allotted places in paradise. Perhaps, being of a more ethereal construction than our commonplace tenants of the Fishery, they would not have been dibbled into the rose-garden, but have been carried down stream with the rocks and trees in a manner shocking to think of, so mutilated, perhaps, that the representatives of the *Saturday Review*, for instance, could scarcely be discerned from those of the *Pall Mall Gazette*. The subject is too frightful to dwell upon; but we repeat it *might* have happened; and in that case, would a surviving critic, when noticing some agreeable story founded on the catastrophe which had befallen his brethren, venture to say that it was “hurried to a conclusion?”

Thus much of apology we think it right to make for having caused the funeral-baked meats, as it may have seemed, to furnish forth the marriage tables. But time has fled, if we have taken no count of it, since that fatal night: though Stanhope and Lucy had married and quitted England within six months, at least a year elapsed before John Denton was wedded to his Ellen. In Mrs. Blackburn they found no obstacle to their engagement, now that her Willy had been snatched away from her: she never had had any real objection to it, except in so far as it seemed to militate against her son's prospects; and indeed the young engineer had, but for that, been always a favorite with her. And he deserved to be so: though she never knew how deeply she was indebted to him, she felt grateful for the tender solicitude with which he endeavored to soothe her declining days, and perhaps even for the reticence which his court-

eous delicacy used with respect to those weary eighteen months of unjust exile he had suffered partly at her hands; but she never guessed that, for her sake, he had hidden a secret in his own breast, and kept it to the end, a secret a hint of which would have brought her gray hairs with more than sorrow to the grave. At present, next to the loss of her son's life, what grieved her most was that his body had not been recovered, or rather, that it had formed one of that score of undistinguishable victims of the catastrophe whom not even their own mothers could have known. She had not even the sad consolation of feeling that her boy lay in the neighboring vault with the rest of his long line of ancestors, and that one day—which was not far off, for she only survived old Anthony two years—she should be laid beside him. Thanks to her grandson-in-law, she was spared a far more terrible woe.

Denton, of course, had been one of the chief witnesses at the inquest, and among the dreadful incidents of which he had been the spectator was the identification, or the attempt at identification, of the victims of the flood. Now, there was one body—that of a female—which, although totally uninjured, remained unidentified to the end. It was recognized by a widow in Mosedale in humble circumstances, who let lodgings, as having been a tenant of hers for a few days, but she neither knew her name nor where she came from. The features were strange to all who looked upon them—except one man. Denton alone knew that it was no other than Mrs. William Blackburn—poor Bess; and instinct, stronger even than his sense of justice, bade him hold his peace. There was much talk about this particular incident, for the case was very peculiar: this body had not been hurried down the river, like the rest, but was found in the reservoir itself, when the waters had drained themselves away; and, moreover, it was the opinion of the doctors that death had occurred some days before the general catastrophe. It was supposed that the unhappy woman, whoever she was, had gone up to that desolate moor, and there committed suicide. And in this idea Denton himself had at first coincided. It seemed to him, who knew her timidity well, probable enough, that, being deserted by her husband—for it was now evident that his story of her having died at Formosa was false—she had ventured to come into the neighborhood, perhaps with the hope of even yet winning him back to her, perhaps only with the fond desire of looking at his newly acquired greatness afar off; and that then having heard, as she was certain to do, of his unprincipled courtship of Lucy Waller, wretchedness and despair had caused her to commit self-destruction. But afterwards it was his lot to hear from Mrs. Blackburn's own lips—how little she knew with what horror they were filling him!—a circumstance which convinced him that her son had been a guiltier wretch than even he had deemed him.

She was talking, as she took that grim pleasure in doing which may be noticed in all persons of her class, of the terrible events which had deprived her of son and husband at a blow: and Ellen, striving to evade the subject, had used some commonplace about the terrible unexpectedness of the calamity, when Mrs. Blackburn said: "Nay, Ellen; it may have been unexpected; but now that it has happened, I may tell you both that it did not come without warning—I mean without another sort of warning than that which John gave us; for I myself had a Message from the Dead." Then she told them how she had seen the ghost of Bess in Redmoor Firgrove, and how, since she knew it boded ill to the Blackburn race, she had revealed it to her Willy.

"Then that accounts," said Ellen gravely, "for poor Uncle William's strange behavior in that very wood when we were moving to the cottage;" and she narrated—of course omitting all mention of William's brutal conduct to herself—his wild bearing during that journey.

"Ay," said Mrs. Blackburn, "doubtless that was the cause. I know for many a day after I had told him, my Willy used to go over the moor, in hopes, may be, of seeing his poor Bess once

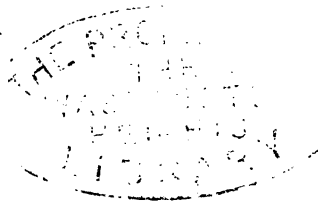
again; even though she was no longer flesh and blood. Heaven only knows whether he did or not; though it is now clear to me that she came on his account."

Once again that day, when Denton was alone with her, the widow again reverted to this subject. "I didn't like to talk more about it before Ellen this morning," said she, "because just now, you know, in her delicate condition, it might not be so well—"

"Forgive me, my dear Mrs. Blackburn," interrupted the young man gravely; "but it is a subject that you should not talk of to *any body*, and upon which, if you will take my advice, you will for the future be silent."

"What! it's unlucky, is it? Well, I dare say it is; and I am sure we have had misfortunes enough without our bringing them upon ourselves; so I will never mention it again—only just tell me, John—you who are so wise about every thing—do you think it possible that my poor dear Willy ever *did* see Bess on Redmoor?"

"Yes, madam," replied Denton, with averted face and involuntary shudder—which Mrs. Blackburn ascribed to superstitious fear—"I think he did."



THE END.

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